**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2011**

Geography   **GEOG3**

(Specification 2030)

Unit 3: Contemporary Geographical Issues

Report on the Examination

General

GEOG3 was taken only by a small number of candidates, approximately 400. Within this small number, there were some very good responses but also some very poor ones. The proportion of the latter was greater than that experienced in the summer, and there were many more in the middle mark ranges. This probably reflects the high proportion of resit candidates taking this paper. There were also a small number of incidences of rubric contravention – mainly due to students answering two structured questions from the same half of the specification – Physical or Human. In terms of popularity, answers to the Plate Tectonics and World Cities questions were again the most popular, with answers to the Weather and Climate and Development and Globalisation questions also being relatively numerous. With the availability of the Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA) it is now possible for centres to see the performance of their own candidates on a question by question basis, and also to see information on the relative popularity of each question. Consequently this report will not comment in a detailed fashion on these aspects.

GEOG3 is an entirely optional paper, and both 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 questions 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 4** – Question 10 - presented a certain issue (referred to as data waffle) which may repeat itself in other options in subsequent series.

The following section consists of a re-working of the main points regarding the nature of the examination set out in the Report on the Examination, summer series 2010.

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, is constructed to the same format. The mark allocation for each of these is 7, 8, and 10, and for each the philosophy behind the nature of the tasks is the same.

The 7 mark questions

This requires 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 to generally 'comment on' what he/she could see (but not Questions 4 and 16). In Question 7, an additional command was given. In each question requiring 'comment', material that is described or 'lifted' can only gain Level 1 credit. Candidates have to do more than this though – they have to infer other geographical aspects from the data that are not immediately obvious. In doing so, candidates are being required to demonstrate geographical processing and/or thinking. Further points on individual questions will be given below.

The 8 mark questions

These questions are 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 are perhaps more familiar to students and less challenging. However, they were again the most disappointing in terms of outcome. Many 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 most disappointing answers of this type were Questions 2, 11 and 14, although it is fair to say that high marks were rare on all of them. Further points on individual questions will be given below.

The 10 mark questions

The 10 mark questions take the knowledge and understanding that a candidate has into a slightly higher level of intellectual thought, 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. Once again, more detail on this will be given below in relation to individual questions.

The 40 mark essays

These questions are synoptic in design and they tend to be more open-ended in terms of their demands. There is no perfectly correct way to answer them, and candidates should be encouraged to have confidence in going about their task in the knowledge of this. The Notes for Answers 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 statement?' 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 always find the middle line, or be obliged to follow the accepted view. When questions of this type are set, 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 four 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/examples 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 high marks being awarded on several occasions. As an exercise in discrimination, the essays were successful, and some candidates are to be congratulated on the quality of their responses to these questions.

Normally general issues and concerns are addressed in the earlier sections of such a report. Bearing in mind the small entry, such issues and concerns will be addressed at greater length within the sections dealing with individual questions. However, one common theme should be stated at this point – those candidates who provide an appropriate A2 level of response with, for example, good use of case study material and sophisticated discussion of processes will gain higher marks. Candidates who construct their answers simplistically and with generalities throughout can only gain lower marks.

The questions will now be examined in turn.

Question 01

This was a popular question and was answered quite well on the whole. Most candidates did try to appreciate that the data demonstrated that the Philippines was at high risk of tectonic hazards, and made some assessment of why that was the case. Better responses linked the existence of trenches to destructive margins and relevant processes that would endanger lives, for example suggesting that Manila was close to two volcanoes and the potential hazards, such as pyroclastic flows, that this would bring. However, some linked trenches with constructive margins and lost track of the argument. The numerous active faults also suggested the prevalence of earthquakes – an intelligent and knowledgeable observation to make.

There were a few who simply presented a 'theoretical' answer based on their knowledge and class notes on Pinatubo; these often bore little relationship to the data provided. Case study knowledge is not applicable for these types of questions.

Question 02

The mean mark for this question was within Level 1, which suggests that most candidates had insufficient knowledge and understanding of this small element of the specification. Less able candidates were diverted by the statement about plate movement to describe 'hot spots at plate boundaries', whereas more able candidates demonstrated good understanding of mid-plate volcanoes and hot spots, and were able to illustrate these with reference to Hawaii. These candidates did appreciate that the hot spot was stationary and that as the plate continued to move this would produce the chain of islands. The final mark was determined by the extent to which students could explain this clearly, with causes and final outcomes being apparent.

Question 03

As was the case with a similar question in the summer 2010 paper concerning earthquakes, many answers were effectively two accounts with minimal comparison; often concentrating on management rather than nature and impact. Whilst 'management' aspects were relevant in explaining why impacts might be less for one event compared with another, this was often not in context because no or limited specific detail was actually given about impacts. This also raises another issue – the ability to be specific about the named event. For example, some candidates presented information for the wrong event, e.g. presenting detail on Mount Etna relating to a much more damaging event with 'thousands of deaths'. To gain the highest level students had to provide detailed comments on nature and impact with explicit comparisons between the two events.

Question 04

Note that this question did not ask for 'commentary', however, there were two commands which the candidates were required to address – 'describe' and 'explain'. Many candidates recognised that the synoptic chart showed an anticyclone and consequently some answers just described what an anticyclone should be like rather than refer to the information on **Figure 2**. These presented a general, theoretical paragraph and then in most cases went on to say what the weather was like in E England or further afield.

Whilst description was thorough because of the ease of reading such data, reasons were not well-developed or even attempted by a large number of candidates. The most commonly rewarded reason was 'gentle pressure gradient/wide-spaced isobars' as an explanation for low wind speeds; beyond this the reasons were not convincing. There is still much confusion about fog, whether this is of the radiation or advection variety: 'cool winds off the sea being warmed by the land' would not produce condensation. There were very few high-scoring answers because very few candidates seemed to understand the link between descending air, warming and the related capacity to hold moisture, which would influence both precipitation and cloud formation.

Question 05

Candidates showed good knowledge producing a comparatively higher-scoring answer than the equivalents elsewhere. Many described the effect of four or five air masses, often with good or appropriate source location, sometimes making good use of a sketch map.

Weaker responses tended to describe the effect of Polar Maritime and Tropical Maritime air meeting to produce a depression, only to find that Question 6 was about this part of the specification. There was also some 'fudging' of precise weather conditions in terms of whether the air mass produced warm/hot or cool/cold/very cold conditions, but the overall standard was encouraging.

Question 06

The bulk of responses to this question were weak and superficial. Candidates had only a very simplistic understanding of the origin of depressions and depressingly (sic) little knowledge about the weather or weather changes associated with them. Processes/mechanisms were not explained beyond simple statements such as 'warm air meets cold air' and 'air is forced to rise'. Good answers were rare; most candidates persisted in describing how the depression moved and became occluded without seeming to take any note of the requirements of the question.

Question 07

Candidates did appreciate that **Figure 3** showed a deciduous woodland and, as in other questions, many then described what one might expect to see in such a biome, irrespective of what was shown in the photograph. Some of this required a good imagination or X-ray vision - the invitation to 'comment' in this case produced some quite marginal material on brown earth soil or aspects of 'management' that were not apparent, nor could be assumed from the source. There were some very good answers with some detail and sensible comments on aspects of the woodland and evidence that it was a climax community.

Candidates were not sure of the degree of light penetration or restriction, and this impacted upon their interpretation of the presence/absence of vegetation at the field layer. The extent of leaf litter led many to assume that it was autumn – the photograph was taken in spring. Clearly they were not sure as to how long it does take to break down this layer. However, examiners were sympathetic in this aspect of answers.

Question 08

Candidates mainly chose a lithosere, but a number of psammoseres and hydroseres were presented. There was evidence that most candidates did have understanding of the seral progression, if only in general terms, and they knew that the climax was deciduous woodland, often involving oak.

Answers varied according to the degree of detail given about specific species in successive seres - many candidates just suggested that 'the next vegetation could then move in' but were reluctant, or unable, to name plants. Likewise, they could suggest that there were 'changes that allowed new plants to colonise' but these changes/processes were often not developed. The best answers did consider changes/modifications to the microclimate and ground level conditions, particularly water retention, proto-soil and nutrient availability and retention, as well as factors such as competition and dominance.

Question 09

The selection of a suitable plagioclimax was fundamental to this question. Most did refer to heather moorlands and were able to describe how they had come about as a result of clearance of woodland. The better answers were also able to explain how human activity influenced the vegetation and prevented progression through the succession.

However, some candidates chose to write about other biomes also affected by humans, for example the tropical rainforest. Whilst it is clear that humans have undoubtedly had an impact on the removal of the forest, it is much more difficult to explain what the current (plagioclimax) vegetation consists of as the land has been cleared for roads, settlements and ranches. It was hard for candidates to

explain how humans were maintaining the plagioclimax vegetation when there was no vegetation to explain.

Some candidates used a conservation area, such as Troopers' Hill, as the basis of their answer. This does have a current vegetation to write about but often the human activity was quite limited in that candidates only wrote about the act of clearance. Both of these examples demonstrate some confusion regarding the purpose of case study material – i.e. where does it fit most appropriately in the question?

Question 10

Candidates had significant problems interpreting the upper half of **Figure 4**. The graph is a compound line graph, where the blue section represented the growth of out-of-town centre retail parks. Too many students stated that these increased from 11 million m^2 to 27 million m^2, rather than giving the correct figures. In terms of the lower graph, candidates often simply lifted or described in basic terms what was happening to particular types of shop without any elaboration or evidence of thinking about the changes in the wider context of shopping habits and behaviour. Such simple statements keep the answer within Level 1. Better responses did recognise that weekly/fortnightly shopping and increased car ownership would enable shoppers to do all their shopping in one venue rather than visit different shops in the CBD – hence the growth of the OOTCs. Only a few could suggest why there may have been reductions in some CBD activities, and yet growth in others. Once again, examiners want candidates to reflect on the data, and make intelligent and informed comment. This could involve an element of critical understanding. The lower half of **Figure 4** gave data on a sample of small town centres – it could be argued that the impact of OOTC retail parks on these has been less than expected?

Question 11

The responses to this question were, on the whole, disappointing. As candidates knew a lot about OOTCs they tended to generalise - many could have been writing about any OOTC. In a few cases there was sufficient detail and depth to recognise a particular place with accurate location near specified motorways/junctions and with specific information about the particular flagship stores or outlets, and/or characteristics that were peculiar to that area. Some locations were simply unreliable geographically: 'Meadowhall having an impact upon Dudley', or 'Merry Hill being next to the M6', even 'Bluewater being on the outskirts of Manchester'.

Question 12

This proved to be a difficult question for a large number of candidates, with the mean mark being only just into Level 2. Many ignored the reference to 'in response to recent trends in retailing' in the question and wrote about any form of urban regeneration that they could think of from their notes, e.g. London Docklands, Notting Hill, and Hulme City Challenge. These were not schemes that were set up in response to retailing changes - these were about inner city decline or gentrification.

Where schemes were relevant, they were often very superficial and lacked detail about particular measures or developments designed to allow the CBD to 'fight back'. This often comprised 'pedestrianisation' or 'better shops' - it was difficult to appreciate how such measures would attract shoppers back to the CBD. Some better candidates did give specific examples and developed schemes in depth, although the redevelopment management team in Birmingham would be dismayed to hear that one of their flagship projects has been downgraded to the "Letter Box".

Question 13

Some candidates also had difficulty with the compound line graph in **Figure 5**, debt relief being incorrectly quoted as rising to $100 billion. Trends were identified but not well quantified. This undermined performance in that description was poor and candidates found it hard to say anything particularly telling about the trends. Many spent too long seeking correlations between the two sets of data, trying to explain minor variations in aid and trade.

Overall, responses were poor. Many candidates did not seem to understand the term 'duty free', thinking that less-developed countries would receive less income and make less profit without realising that the duty was imposed by the importing country, and without duties this would make trading easier. Better responses regarding the lower graph were able to comment that the increase in debt relief grants may have been due to the Gleneagles meeting of the G8 in 2005 – again evidence of appropriate geographical thinking.

Question 14

Less-able candidates were confused over issues and reasons in the context of this question. Debt is an issue, but candidates needed to understand why the country had needed to take out loans in the first place. Debt could then be seen as a reason for lack of investment in other economic areas because so much money had to be fed back into loan management. Answers were often very simplistic and basic, lacking any geographical foothold in an example. There were very few candidates who could present a range of issues, and exemplify them, and recognise the inter-relationships and complexities that exist in such countries.

Question 15

The majority of answers to this question concentrated on Sustainable Tourism, and these tended to be slightly better answered than those examining Economic/Environmental sustainability.
In their discussion of economic *versus* environmental sustainability, many candidates ignored the 'versus' and described aspects of economic sustainability and aspects of environmental sustainability without discussing the extent to which these might be compatible or not. Some answers were sound, but almost entirely theoretical. Answers did need some geographical basis to facilitate discussion.

For 'sustainable tourism', many candidates could give some example of eco-tourism, albeit at a small scale, but often failed to consider the idea that this concept might be a myth or a reality depending on the scale or context. The idea of this sort of discussion seemed to be beyond most candidates. As with Questions 12 and 18, it would seem that many candidates found this a challenging task.

Question 16

The responses to this question were the best within the Human Questions stimulus questions. However, weaker candidates restricted their answers to simply describing where the two ethnic groups were located within Nottingham with only basic, if any, comparison. Better answers did identify and support comparisons and/or contrasts which allowed access to Level 2.

Question 17

On the other hand, answers here were often quite basic. Some migrations to the UK were identified, often with a very flimsy grasp of the areas of origin, causes, or time-line involved. Anything prior to the EU and the 'mass migration' of the Poles into the UK appears to be ancient history in the eyes of many students. There were some very specific examples from a few candidates, but most did not appreciate the complexity of the society resulting from changes beyond migration, such as inter-marriage and integration of cultures.

Question 18

As with Questions 14 and 15, the concept of 'issues' caused a problem for some candidates. Many just described 'advantages and disadvantages' rather than basing their answer on an issue and then discussing this theme. Issues are aspects of life that people have views about, have attitudes towards, and can discuss and differ on. They have an impact on how people lead their lives, and can be both beneficial and problematic.

Many answers were almost wholly based on 'prejudice' or 'riots', although there were some good answers that did examine some issues in terms of education, housing and jobs; the latter often being simply the idea of 'foreigners taking jobs'. Many examples were characteristically simplistic. Better quality answers were based in identified areas of the UK, and/or in more sophisticated contexts, and were discussed with maturity.

The Essays

Question 19

This was the most commonly attempted essay, but once again, it demonstrated how candidates fail to respond to the demands of the question asked of them. It is clear that many are primed for the essay on this question and yet they tend to write at great length about material that could be relevant, but with minimal consideration of the question that has been set. Candidates should appreciate that we do not set 'write all you know about' type questions – they are given a task, which requires a degree of thought and reflection.

Even so, there are many lapses and weaknesses, in knowledge and critical understanding. Candidates had little understanding of the time-line in the development of ideas and research in this area; 'examples' were often very superficial and processes were not adequately understood. Discussion of 'other' pieces of evidence was often basic. Many answers went into great detail on the impacts and management of volcanic and seismic hazards, often with great detail of case study events, when this was not required. One examiner commented that 'many candidates would leave the exam thinking that they had written a lot on this topic' and therefore had done well; but unfortunately many answers lacked the focus needed to address the question set.

Question 20

This question again presented an opportunity for many to write at length, this time on the possible impact of global warming in the years and decades to come – a veritable 'doom and gloom' geography. One hopes this was based more on alarmist media speculation rather than teaching in geography classrooms. Answers were often very simplistic – often based on ill-informed arguments. They were mostly lacking in scientific or historical evidence to support either side of the debate. The focus was often on Kyoto, Copenhagen and solutions to the 'problem' rather than a discussion of the possible causes.

However, there were some candidates who presented precise details of the enhanced greenhouse effect with appropriate use of data from organisations such as the IPCC. There was some discussion of ice core analysis, pollen analysis, dendrochronology, historic data/events and other evidence, and informed students could chart their way through a reasonable discussion and come to a view regarding Professor Bellamy's statement...... but these were rare.

Question 21

Very few candidates answered this question, and hence, it is difficult to comment on them generically. The starting point should have been the chosen fragile environments, followed by a discussion on the degree to which they can be both conserved and exploited, or not. Some of the better responses seen tended to frame their answers within a tropical rainforest environment where there is the constant pressure and desire to deforest, and yet at the same time others demand preservation.

Question 22

This essay was the second most popular but the outcomes were mixed. The question may have seemed more straightforward and hence, been easier to keep 'on task'. Candidates may have felt they were on safer ground presenting details of their chosen and learnt schemes. Overall, they could do this quite well, often with relevant detail. However, as with a similar structured question in the summer, what they did find difficult was the idea of *evaluating* success - this was normally very low key, and basic with merely superficial comments such as 'it has been successful' or 'worked well'. There was a lack of detailed analysis of what is meant by 'success' and how it is measured. The notion of criteria upon which success can be measured was not fully appreciated. Candidates often presented similar schemes in different locations when it would perhaps have been better to consider schemes at different scales and with different funding mechanisms; this might then have allowed for some assessment of success according to the scale of the scheme.

In addition, candidates should be aware that it is very difficult to evaluate schemes which have yet to be completed. Proposals cannot be evaluated in terms of their success – they may not go ahead.

Question 23

Answers to this question tended to be generally stronger than the above. The majority of candidates were able to write at some length about the European Union, with additional elements on NAFTA, the G8, or the UN. The roles were generally well understood and developed but assessment of the relative roles was weak. As with Question 22, candidates did not present enough evidence of the effectiveness or otherwise of the grouping in achieving the aims linked to the stated roles. Judgement of the success/role was more implicit than explicit. For example, candidates talked about the role of the UN as a peace keeping agency, but there was little assessment of the effectiveness of this role.

Another issue arose in the assessment of this essay. Both the question and the specification refer to 'groupings of nations' as opposed to 'groups'. The spirit of this area of study is, therefore, that groupings have a raison d'être that the member countries have decided upon between themselves, such as reduced barriers to trade, or free movement of labour, as in NAFTA and the EU. Groups identified by others, such as the 'North' and the 'South', the NICs, and more specifically the BRIC countries cannot reasonably be classified as 'groupings' in this context. To assess their role becomes somewhat abstract. However, examiners did endeavour to be sympathetic when candidates unwittingly adopted this track. The problem fundamentally lies with acronyms - whilst any group could be abbreviated to its acronym, acronyms are not by default a grouping.

Question 24

A small proportion of candidates attempted this question. There were two elements to it – the causes of poverty and the means by which it is being addressed. The former element tended to be discussed in very general terms, with little specific detail or sophistication. The second element was better understood, with some understanding of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, as elsewhere, there was little appreciation of how to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies within the MDGs, nor even any information of what the UN itself has said regarding meeting its targets. There was also surprisingly little comment on other global strategies such as aid and developing trade.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.