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General Certificate of Education (A-level)
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Geography   GEO4B

(Specification 2030)

Unit 4B: Geographical Issue Evaluation

Report on the Examination

General

What was done well

- The timing was generally good. Very few candidates failed to answer all of the questions and very few showed any evidence of rushing to finish their answers.
- Many candidates showed evidence of good research into the topic presented in the Advance Information Booklet. Most had visited the recommended DfID website. A significant number also showed evidence of research from other sources and when this research was used in answers it was usually used in a relevant and interesting way.
- The structure of the question paper demanded that candidates write in a synoptic way and almost all candidates responded well to this demand. Developing links between different aspects of the subject did not seem to present problems for those entered for this examination.
- The quality of discussion and argument was also generally good. In particular it was pleasing to see that many candidates were able to bring a clear moral perspective into their discussion of ideas and points of view in Question 2 (b).

What was done less well

- A significant minority of candidates continues to have difficulty writing legibly. Examiners have always struggled hard to read some scripts but have generally done their very best to interpret what has been produced. However, the illegibility problem can only be made worse now that the scanning of scripts for on-line marking is becoming more widespread. When candidates truly *cannot* produce easily legible answers their teachers might be advised to seek alternative ways for them to produce their answers, probably by asking permission for them to type their answers. Otherwise these candidates will inevitably lose some marks when their work just cannot be understood or interpreted.
- Very few candidates know precisely why particular skills should be used to present particular types of data. A large majority of the candidates chose an inappropriate technique to display the data in Question 1.
- Careless reading of instructions then meant that many candidates presented the wrong data, or too much data, in Question 1 (b).
- Further lack of care was shown in the failure of many candidates to complete their answers in Question 1 (b), by failing to add a key to their maps.

Question 1 (a)

The data to be displayed are given in terms of total deaths for each district. They are **not** in deaths per hectare or deaths per thousand of the population. Therefore a choropleth map is not really suitable. Choropleth maps should be used for showing densities, not totals.

The best ways to show this data are to use located proportional symbols, with located bars probably being the best. Had there been a bigger range of values to show proportional circles might have been better but totals between 0 and 59 can easily be displayed on bars. Dot maps could have been a suitable alternative.

A fully suitable technique for presenting totals could gain full marks in both question parts 1 (a) and 1 (b). If a less suitable technique was chosen it was limited to marks of 6 and 3 for the two parts of the question. In practice this meant that most candidates could not gain full marks, as a choropleth map was by far the most popular choice of technique.

In order to gain a Level 2 mark an answer had to attempt both parts of Question 1 (a) – that is to describe the technique and to justify its choice – and to write a clear and full answer to at least one of the two parts. Both parts needed to be completed clearly to gain full marks. Unfortunately very few of the candidates who chose to use proportional symbols justified the choice well so there were very few marks of 7 or 8.

Question 1 (b)

2 marks were awarded for choosing a suitable symbol and locating it correctly. 2 further marks were awarded for choosing a suitable scale and for presenting it properly in the key.

Many of those candidates who chose located bars gained 3 or 4 marks for this section. Many of those who chose choropleth maps gained 3 marks.

A significant minority of candidates did not follow the instructions provided in the question. Too many of them showed information from Figure P1 rather than from Figure P2. Then too many candidates who chose data from Figure P2 over-complicated their maps by trying to show **both** deaths and injuries rather than just showing deaths. This led to these candidates generally choosing an inappropriate scale.

Question 2 (a)

Candidates performed much better on this question. They had generally prepared well and were able to use their knowledge well to answer the question concisely.

The best answers were generally produced by people who chose to write about the development of scuba rice. There was plenty of precise information on the website about both the development and the application of this new strain of rice. Most candidates who chose this project gained Level 2 at least, with a considerable proportion going on to gain maximum marks for the question.

The Chars Livelihood Programme also gained good marks for many candidates, although answers on this topic were generally less precise than answers which dealt with scuba rice.

Not all the projects described on the DfID website were actually funded by DfID. However, it was felt that it would have been unfair to exclude any project discussed on the site, so projects such as the 'beira' floating gardens were allowed and given credit. However, some answers relied almost entirely on information from the Advance Information Booklet and did not add to this with research from the website. Such answers were usually limited to Level 1 marks.

Question 2 (b)

This question differentiated well and produced a full range of answers from candidates. The best were excellent but some lost marks by failing to address the question that was set.

The main themes that were developed in the good answers to this question included:

- moral arguments, including arguments based on humanitarian ideals or religious beliefs
- historical arguments, including some based on British colonial history and some based on obligations resulting from post-colonial and Commonwealth links
- arguments based on kinship, with many UK residents having very close ties with Bangladesh
- arguments based on self interest, including the development of trade relationships, the reduction of extremism and the gaining of international prestige
- arguments on the reduction of population growth and poverty reducing pressure to migrate to the UK, where over-population is already becoming apparent.

Poorer answers often concentrated on:

- Bangladesh's needs rather than concentrating on the 'UK taxpayers' point of view
- **how** the money could be used rather than **why** it should be provided.

A very small minority failed to answer the question and, instead, explained why UK money should not be sent to Bangladesh. On the other hand some very good answers started by giving some reasons against providing aid but then providing good counter-arguments to this point of view.

Question 3

In general this produced candidates' best responses. They had generally prepared well and were able to use good knowledge and understanding to produce clear, well balanced, synoptic answers.

Almost all candidates were able to write well about various aspects of physical geography. Understanding of rivers and flooding was almost always good. Understanding of climate factors was generally also good, even though it was quite clear that only a minority of candidates had studied the weather and climate option. Those who had not studied the option had clearly done good preparation in the lead-up period before the exam.

Aspects of human geography were also generally quite well understood although it sometimes appeared that the human factors were added as something of an afterthought to the physical geography. The demographics of the population and the economics of subsistence agriculture were the main themes that were considered.

The best answers dealt clearly with the connections between the physical and the human aspects of Bangladesh's geography. Some of the connections were quite obvious – deforestation leading to erosion, deposition and flooding; increased release of carbon dioxide leading to climate change, increased flooding and increased intensity of storms. However, the best answers were often those that developed the connections between population growth and the pushes that were driving increased numbers of people to live in areas of marginal land subject to regular severe physical hazards.

Question 4

This also produced some very good answers but they had to be very carefully planned to cover the whole question and to gain high Level 2 or Level 3 marks. Three key elements were key to gaining high marks. These were:

1. Evidence of improved management, particularly through clear use of the statistics showing how death tolls from cyclones have generally been reduced since the 1970 cyclone.
2. Evidence of good management being in place now could come from the report on the response to Cyclone Aila or from the DfID information or from other sources.
3. Suggestions as to why more work will be needed in future. This could be based on details about shortcomings in management that were evident in the response to Cyclone Aila but more important evidence also needed to come from predictions of population increase and climate change.

Almost all candidates dealt well with the second of these parts, although some went into too much detail and ignored the other two parts of the answer. These candidates did not appear to have planned their answers carefully enough; rather they seemed to have rushed their answers and tried to cram in every piece of evidence from the AIB, without using the AIB as a basis for developing their own ideas.

Many candidates completed two of the three parts of the task but even here there was evidence of poor planning and selection of examples. Quite a large proportion of the entry filled the space allowed for this answer and then used extra sheets as well but still did not answer the full question. Again more thought and more selectivity would have raised the marks of these candidates.

The minority who did all three parts well produced excellent answers. Most of these were produced at the end of what was a demanding paper that tested a wide range of candidates' abilities. The individuals who produced these excellent answers under these difficult conditions deserve great credit. They showed real geographical understanding and strong technique.

Conclusion

- Candidates and their teachers must be aware that there will be questions on selection and use of skills of data collection, presentation and analysis on this paper. They need to have prepared carefully for such answers. The skills question on this paper was the least successful from candidates' point of view, and similar skills questions have not always been done well on past 4B papers.
- On this paper there was evidence that the recommendations for further research had been followed carefully. This has not always been the case on past papers. However, it is hoped that this improvement will continue.
- There was evidence that many candidates did not read the question carefully enough in either Q1a or Q1b. Candidates must be given very careful advice on this point in future.
- Candidates must also plan their answers very carefully. The best planning was excellent but there was clear evidence that many middle and lower ability candidates lost quite a lot of marks because they rushed answers to Q4 and were not selective enough in their use of information from the AIB.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results statistics page of the AQA Website.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion