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**General Certificate of Education (A-level)**
**January 2012**

**Geography**                                        **GEOG3**

**(Specification 2030)**

**Unit 3: Contemporary Geographical Issues**

## *Report on the Examination*

# General

This examination was taken only by a small number of candidates, approximately 340. Within this small number there were some very good responses from some candidates but also some very poor ones from others. 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 re-sit candidates taking this paper. There were also a small number of incidences of rubric contravention – mainly due to candidates answering two structured questions from the same half of the specification – Physical or Human. Answers to the Plate Tectonics and World Cities options were again the most popular, with answers to the Weather and Climate and Development and Globalisation options also being relatively numerous, especially for the structured questions. With the availability of the Enhanced Results Analysis 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 detail on these aspects.

GEOG3 has no compulsory questions, 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 2 (Question 04) and Figure 6 (Question 16) presented a certain issue (colloquially known 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 that has been given in previous Examiners' Reports. This report will just make salient points regarding this particular paper.

# 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:

## (a) The 7 mark question

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 'describe and comment on' or just 'comment on' what he/she could see. In each question material that is 'lifted' can gain Level 1 credit. Candidates have to do more than this to access level 2. In order to comment 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.

## (b) The 8 mark question

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 (outline, describe, suggest reasons) should be more familiar to candidates and less challenging. However, they were often 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 – candidates are expected to know the content of the specification in a detailed, precise and accurate manner.

## *(c) The 10 mark question*

The 10 mark questions perhaps make a higher level of intellectual demand on candidates requiring them to apply their 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 'Assess', 'Discuss' and 'Evaluate'. Performance here was 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.

## *(d) The 40 mark essays*

These questions are synoptic in design and they are also open-ended in terms of their demands. 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* 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. The essay is assessed in its totality. In some questions candidates are also asked to express an overall view or opinion – 'to what extent ...?' or '... discuss the extent ...'. 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. Questions of this type will continue to 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 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
- The use of case studies/examples to support the argument
- Evidence of synopticity – the degree to which candidates 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 a few candidates are to be congratulated on the quality of their responses to these questions.

It is also normally the case that general issues and concerns are addressed in the earlier sections of such a Report. Bearing in mind the small nature of the 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 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

The information given in Figure 1 was relatively easy to interpret – the extent of damage increases with the intensity of the earthquake as indicated by the Mercalli scale, and the amount of damage inflicted decreases with the degree to which buildings are protected. Most candidates were able to identify and describe these trends (albeit often at length) with varying degree of accuracy to gain Level 1 credit. To access Level 2 candidates had to make both good use of the data and make a comment that arises from the data – such as links to levels of development or the role of building structures in actual seismic events.

## Question 02

Most candidates recognised that there is a variety of seismic waves that emanate from the focus of an earthquake (though a significant number referred to the epicentre, which is incorrect and some referred to tsunamis as being seismic waves – also incorrect). The main issues concerned the ability to be accurate and precise about the nature of those waves. Many candidates managed to get the characteristics confused, or totally wrong. Candidates who had learnt this small section of their notes thoroughly did well.

## Question 03

Two elements of this question caused some difficulty for candidates – the command word 'evaluate' and the word 'following'. As is often the case, many candidates began their answers with an account of the effects/impacts of their chosen earthquake before moving on to management strategies. Such a preamble was not needed. Once management strategies were referred to, they were then often generalised, and non-specific to that event, or in some cases preparatory. For example, in accounts based on the Kobe earthquake candidates referred to earthquake drills (which had taken place for many years prior to Kobe) and to reinforcing buildings (again rather generic). Examiners were also looking for some statement of success or otherwise of strategies in the immediate aftermath of an earthquake as well as possibly some indication of what changed following the event in the longer term. There were some good accounts of the aftermath of the earthquakes of L'Aquila, Sichuan and the 2011 Tohoku earthquake.

## Question 04

The main area of difficulty here concerned the ability to understand the left hand axis of Figure 2. The three data sets showed changes in global surface temperatures, global sea levels and northern hemisphere snow cover compared to an average of the values in the 30 year period 1961 to 1990 respectively. Some candidates could not understand this and hence were determined to describe the changes in the context of just a 30 year period. Many thought that the base line on the temperature graph was 0 degrees and therefore commented on the temperature moving above freezing. This meant that they did not identify, for example, the time lag between the rise of temperature and the decrease in snow cover. On the other hand others did understand the time frames involved using the x-axis, and were able to describe the trends in each of the graphs and thereby gain Level 1 credit. As with Question 01, to access Level 2 candidates had to comment on these trends, by for example making statements on their causes, or the strength of the interrelationships that existed between the three sets of data.

## Question 05

The most commonly discussed area here concerned the monsoon areas of India and particularly Bangladesh. It appeared that many candidates made use of the pre-release material from last summer's Geo 4B examination, which is acceptable. Simple, and often generic, statements of possible effects were credited within Level 1. Level 2 credit was awarded to statements that were clearly rooted in the area identified. Examiners also credited effects that went beyond climatic effects – such as effects on the wider biome and on humans, so long as the initial point was climatic.

## Question 06

Responses to this question were very disappointing. Several candidates missed or ignored the international scale context given in the question, and wrote at length about what individual cities, groups or individual people were doing or could do to combat global warming. Examiners did allow more local scale initiatives but only after they had been linked to an international scale response. The great majority of candidates had heard of the Kyoto Protocol but most were unable to provide much detail other than that the USA had not signed it. References to more recent international moves were almost non-existent.

## Question 07

Figure 3 was a relatively straightforward set of bar graphs showing how the impact of grazing patterns by sheep and cattle vary in their impact on plant and fly species over time on Salisbury Plain. As elsewhere candidates were able to describe the trends shown, often in great detail, and hence gained Level 1 credit. Level 2 credit was awarded to commentary beyond the description – for example recognising the role that cattle and sheep have over time in increasing biodiversity, and that the planned use of grazing creates a plagioclimax environment which is more diverse than nature would create. There were also some slight anomalies to this, for instance the impact of sheep grazing over a short period of time. Several candidates recognised the importance of the role of animal faeces in increasing biodiversity – a worthwhile comment to make.

## Question 08

This question was answered generally well by those candidates who had learnt this area of their notes, and less well by those who had not. For the former it was a straightforward task, dependent on their depth of knowledge.

## Question 09

Examiners adopted a very flexible approach to this question. The intention was that answers should come from the part of the specification looking at ecological conservation areas at a local scale. However, a few candidates 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, namely that a 'local scale response' was discussed within the broad framework of evaluation. Candidates were usually able to describe their chosen 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. On the other hand some answers were very detailed and matched successful developments with the stated aims. Good candidates did present some very good material on well-known (or at least text-book based) examples such as Dulwich Upper Wood.

## Question 10

This question, in common with the other human stimulus questions, just asked for a commentary on the area shown in the photograph, Figure 4. The question stated that the area had recently undergone redevelopment, and it was hoped that candidates would be able to comment on the evidence that supported this. Weaker responses identified features that were visible – restaurants, flats, steps, railings, plants, etc., and gained Level 1 credit. Level 2 credit was awarded to comments such as the 24 hour nature of the activities shown, the mix of old and new styles of architecture to make the area more appealing, and the type of clientele likely to be attracted to such an area.

## Question 11

Candidates were in most cases able to define the process and give general push/pull factors and effects, but they did not offer much sophistication for either. Examiners would have liked to see some discussion on the types of housing being developed, or more subtle description of the nature of changing services in the areas affected. Detailed references to examples were in the minority, though the towns of Whitley Bay and St Ives featured regularly as locations. Even then, specific detail on changes in these towns was often lacking. Answers were very generalised in the main. Counter-urbanisation was also attributed by some 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 counter-urbanisation is taking place – the smaller towns and villages where people are moving to. Also a small number confused re-urbanisation or suburbanisation with counter-urbanisation.

## Question 12

This question was either understood perfectly, or completely misinterpreted. Urbanisation is the process whereby the proportion of people living in urban areas is increasing. It is not concerned with gentrification, or where redevelopment or re-urbanisation is taking place **unless** there is a net gain of people. The spirit of the question was to examine the issues facing growing cities in the developing world, such as Mumbai and Sao Paulo, and if chosen, candidates had a great deal to consider. Whilst not incorrect, references to areas such as the London Docklands and the Hyde Park flats in Sheffield were challenging to assess, as it was difficult to find suitable discussion of the issues resulting from urbanisation being faced. For this type of scenario candidates tended to write all they knew about the area, without addressing the question set.

## Question 13

The major sticking point for this question was whether the candidate knew the concept of the North/South divide. The Equator was deliberately omitted on Figure 5 to prevent candidates referring to the northern hemisphere v the southern hemisphere. Regrettably, many did. Those who knew the model were able to access this question easily. They could identify where the model seemed to fit using the data provided, and equally where there were anomalies to the overall expected pattern. Unfortunately, seemingly competent answers often gave the game away by identifying Australia as an anomaly 'because it was in the south'. Suitable commentary then tended to follow to varying effect, usually referring to the rapid economic growth of named countries in South America and south-east Asia.

## Question 14

There was some confusion by some candidates regarding the demands of this question and the next. This question required an outline of the reasons for the growth of groupings of nations such as the EU, NAFTA, UN, NATO, G8, G77, etc. Some candidates considered (incorrectly) that the Asian Tigers, LEDCs, NICs and BRICs are 'groups' when these are simply labels given by others. Examiners had to tease out those factors that were the driving force for membership rather than the subsequent benefits that were then agreed. It is a pity that the bulk of responses concentrated on the need for 'free trade' and 'free movement of labour' – although candidates may know the names of groupings such as NATO, they did not seem to know why they exist. As elsewhere, many answers were generic and remained within Level 1 – more specificity and detail allowed access to Level 2.

## Question 15

A similarly disappointing degree of depth and detail was evident for this question. This question required a discussion of the subsequent benefits or disadvantages of the grouping of nations. Depending on the grouping(s) chosen, candidates could have discussed a range of social, economic, political and environmental consequences. In the case of the EU there are issues associated with the Common Agricultural Policy, the Shengen agreement, and migration from one part of the EU to another and financial regulations such as the European Central Bank, and others. Indeed, it was pleasing to see so many candidates attempting to be contemporary by discussing the financial problems currently facing Greece, Spain and Ireland. Some did this with success – others seemed to get the detail a little wrong. These often failed to appreciate the point of the Union in that they saw the issue as one of 'German tax-payers' being landed with the Greek debt', rather than an organisation to provide support to members of the grouping. A significant minority wanted to discuss the impact of groupings on those who are not a member, for example the problems facing Turkey in its attempts to 'qualify' to join the EU. These were more discussions of isolation rather than grouping, and hence it was difficult to make such points creditworthy.

## Question 16

As with Question 07, this question made use of a fairly straightforward set of bar graphs. Once again, most candidates were able to describe the changes that had taken place in the data over the time period, and thus, they accessed Level 1. Access to Level 2 required commentary on the changes – for example in terms of what was being done to address the proportion living on less than $1.25 a day, or what were the consequences for such large proportions of people in areas such as sub-Saharan Africa, and even what was the possible cause of the slight increase in western Asia? Candidates need to interrogate data with some degree of mature understanding. Another common difficulty was that candidates did not know which countries were located in which parts of Asia.

## Question 17

Maturity of understanding was also required to access Level 2 for this question. Many candidates were able to give lists, or statements, of generic factors causing poverty in the world and thus were able to get some Level 1 credit. Recognition of the complexity of the factors causing poverty, and their interconnectivity in certain parts of the world was required for Level 2. A requirement to present reasons for poverty in a particular place in the world was not required, but this would have assisted in compiling a detailed and sophisticated answer.

## Question 18

As with Question 06, too many candidates failed to note the requirement to discuss the 'solutions' to poverty on a global scale. The question was aimed at the UN Millennium Development Goals, and yet only a minority of candidates recognised this, although some on the other hand, managed to find 10 goals. Discussion of national or even local scale schemes would have been credible so long as they were put in a global context. Unfortunately too few did this. Hence, subsequent discussion was limited, with the outcome that very few candidates accessed credit beyond Level 1 or mid-Level 2.

## *The essays*

## Question 19

As expected, this was the most commonly answered 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 Option 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 clear task, which requires a degree of thought and reflection.

This particular question required a consideration of the extent to which the effects of volcanic hazards can be prepared for, or even planned, prior to an eruption and thereby reduce the overall impact. In many cases the answer may be 'they cannot' – though there are instances where some authorities have carefully planned evacuation routes together with detailed and sophisticated monitoring systems in place. As indicated above, many candidates chose to give the necessary detail of their case study volcanic eruptions, their causes and the management strategies afterwards rather than use much of that same information for the purposes of the question asked of them. Such responses cannot progress to the higher levels of credit as they are not focused on the task. Furthermore, the knowledge of monitoring and other methods to enable planning and preparation was quite weak. Some of the better answers made a clear distinction between the success of mitigating action on being able to save humans and the much less effective options to prevent environmental/economic impacts.

## Question 20

Although not a popular question, many of the same points made in Question 19 above can be made here. This question required a consideration of the extent to which the effects of hazards associated with tropical revolving storms can be prepared for, or even planned, prior to them taking place and thereby reduce the overall impact. To some extent there is possibly more scope here for preparedness and planning to have a significant reducing effect on their impact – there are several instances where carefully planned evacuation procedures together with detailed and sophisticated monitoring systems are in place. As also indicated above, many candidates chose to give the necessary detail of their case study tropical storms, their causes and the management strategies afterwards rather than use much of that same information for the purposes of the question asked of them. Such responses cannot progress to the higher levels of credit as they are not focused on the task.

## Question 21

This too was an unpopular question. However, the few that did attempt it were able to interpret the precise demands of the task, namely to balance the relative influence of climatic conditions and human activity on their chosen biome and to come to a view. There were equal numbers of answers based on the equatorial rainforest biome and savanna grassland biome with perhaps the latter providing better responses, usually being balanced and well-argued answers.

## Question 22

This was another question where there seemed to be a plethora of pre-prepared responses to a previous essay question. Some were successfully adapted to the demands of this question, whereas others were less successful. The best answers examined a range of themes relating to sustainability – such as housing, transport, employment, waste management, pollution – and supported their argument with reference to a range of supportive examples and case studies. The scale of study was urban areas, unlike the following question which had more of a national focus. The better responses also managed to retain a clear sense of focus such that the theme of sustainability, and whether or not it can be achieved, was central to the argument.

## Question 23

There are some parallels between this question and Question 22 above. The central focus of the argument was whether or not sustainability could be achieved in the context of development. Some candidates felt the need to tell examiners all they knew about development theory without relating that theory to actual locations and actual events. Many answers descended into sweeping generality, making simplistic points. Those candidates who could recognise that the terms 'development' and 'sustainability' are themselves complex terms – for example sustainability could be economic, environmental or social – and illustrate their arguments by referring to examples and case studies, often at a national scale, accessed the higher levels of credit. It should also be pointed out that regional and local scale examples could also have been used, provided they were being referred to in the development context.

A very small number of candidates attempted to answer this question in the urban context. They had answered the World Cities structured question earlier in the paper, and also perhaps wanted to answer the World Cities essay question....attempting it here. T

## Question 24

There were few responses to this question, and the majority addressed it in the correct context of conflict over the use of a local resource, i.e. at a local scale. Some candidates misunderstood this scale, and there was a small number of out of context accounts for example, of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and exploitation of the Amazon rainforest. More appropriate examples of contexts referred to the expansion of supermarkets in a variety of locations, the expansion of Manchester Airport, and the building of the M6 Toll through an area of the West Midlands. Even for these though there was perhaps too much narrative of the conflict, rather than addressing the focus of the question. The central element of the task was whether all the participants were, or could be, satisfied by the outcome. In all such conflicts there are 'winners' and 'losers', though of course these may change in extent and impact over time and space. This complexity of the outcome, and how it affects people in differing ways, is where synopticity can feature strongly. A similar issue arose here as in previous series and in different contexts; namely, where candidates have studied an on-going conflict it is difficult to assess the satisfaction with the outcome as it has not been resolved. Candidates have to resort to speculation as to who might be happy with the result, whatever that might be and such responses tend to be weak and generic.