

Version



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

**Geography**

**GEO4B**

**(Specification 2030)**

**Unit 4B: Geographical Issue Evaluation**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General

This paper proved to be one of the most accessible 4B papers that has been set. Questions 2, 3 and 4 all produced many good answers with a good proportion of candidates reaching top Level 2 or Level 3 on all of these questions. Candidates' timings were generally good with very few candidates obviously leaving themselves short of time to finish the last question. When the last question was unfinished or clearly done in a great hurry it was usually clear that time had been lost by the candidates writing in too much detail on earlier questions. Perhaps the most striking and pleasing development shown by the candidature as a whole was the improvement in essay writing style. Two features of the essay writing stood out:

1. the close attention that was paid, by a majority of candidates, to the precise meaning of 'command words' and 'key words' in the questions;
2. very good structuring of answers by many candidates with clear introductions, detailed development sections and interesting conclusions.

There were also several features which showed clear differentiation between the best candidates and the others.

- The best showed a very clear sense of place in their answers. They were clearly aware of the special features of this area, its people and its way of life whereas less able candidates showed a lack of appreciation of the real nature of the area. In many cases the strong sense of place had been developed by studying the photos on the AQA website very carefully. The weaker candidates seemed to have skimmed through them without seeing and absorbing much detail.
- The best used information from the Advance Information Booklet (AIB) as a starting point and then developed their answers by applying their own knowledge and understanding of the course to that information. They often wrote synoptically. Less able candidates often selected relevant information from the AIB, and gained good Level 1 marks for so doing, but did not develop the information by bringing their own understanding to bear on it.
- The best had made a careful study of the alternative energy sources given in the AIB and were able to use the knowledge and understanding gained in a constructive way at the relevant points in their answers. Unfortunately a large number of candidates made little or no reference to this source, falling back on the AIB again, even in answering Q3 where this source was especially relevant.
- Whilst almost all candidates were able to make a reasonable attempt at Question 1 (b), the majority looked for simple links between rainfall and tourist numbers or temperature and tourist numbers, and they also suggested that there were simple correlations between these sets of variables. Only a small minority were able to see that tourist numbers rose as temperature and precipitation fell on either side of their June/July peaks *but then numbers fell again* as temperature and precipitation continued to fall towards the edges of the graph. Even many fairly good candidates tended to oversimplify these relationships.

## Question 1 (a)

As hoped and expected, the majority of candidates either chose a pie graph, a bar graph or a stacked bar to illustrate this data. Many candidates wrote quite well or very well about their method and many others wrote well in justifying their choice. Only a minority managed to combine two good sections. As a result, there were many marks of 3, 4 or 5, with only a few reaching 6 or 7.

The best justification sections pointed out that the series of data were not part of a sequence but were individual and unrelated and that, therefore, a line graph would be inappropriate. Such answers often stated that the chosen technique was good at showing how individual categories contributed a proportion of the whole set of arrivals.

Weaker justifications used phrases like 'clear representation' and 'quickly spot the biggest section' without explaining why the chosen technique was particularly appropriate for this.

Marks could be awarded for pointing out why the chosen technique was preferable to other rejected techniques. They were not awarded for pointing out any drawbacks of the chosen technique as this had not been asked for.

Nor were marks awarded for 'it is easy to draw' or 'it is a commonly used technique'.

### **Question 1 (b)**

Almost all candidates managed to make a reasonable attempt at this question but only a few managed to explain the full nature of the inter-relationships shown by the two graphs (see above).

A minority of candidates had trouble distinguishing between the rainfall data and the temperature data shown on the graph. These had not been labelled in the examination booklet because it was expected that A Level students would be familiar with this way of presenting data. Moreover the data was taken from the AIB where the two data sets had been labelled. Of course the mistakes made with reading the data may have been due to exam pressure but good geographers should have been very familiar with this sort of presentation, they should have studied the data during their period of preparation, and they should have realised when their misreading of the graph was causing them to write something that was clearly wildly wrong.

Sense of a place was shown by the better candidates on this question when they referred to the fact that these figures were for Kathmandu, not for the trekking region around Everest. Equally a lack of this sense of place was shown by candidates who talked in detail about seasons of snowfall and snow melt, but who wrote in the context of winter temperatures of about 10 or 11 °C. In this context it is interesting to note that Chris Walker, shown in some of the photographs, commented that on their trip they had some nights when the temperature fell below -20°C. Good candidates should have been aware of the effect of altitude on temperature.

Finally it should be noted that the question asked about relationships between climate and 'tourist arrivals', and that trekkers and mountaineers made up less than 25% of the arrivals in 2007. Of course, given the emphasis elsewhere in the AIB study it was inevitable that candidates were going to concentrate on the way climate affected this group....but they could not obtain full marks for this question unless they showed some awareness of the other groups of tourists. Groups such as Pilgrimage, Conference and Official tourists must have a less intimate relationship with the weather than mountaineers do. Perhaps this might explain why numbers of visitors are still high even in months with extreme monsoon weather.

### **Question 2**

It was here that candidates really showed their essay planning skills at their best.

First of all they had to decide whether to concentrate on discussing one or more of the following aspects of the question:

1. are the Himalayas fragile?
2. what is the nature of the threat or threats to them?
3. how concerned should we be about that threat?

In fact Level 3 could have been gained by concentrating on any one of these questions, but the best answers usually discussed at least two and often all three of them.

Many candidates started by discussing the first of these questions. In fact many of these began by writing very clear and sensible definitions of 'a fragile environment'. They then considered fragility in terms of one or more of the following themes:

- tectonic instability;
- glacial and periglacial activity;
- delicately balanced ecosystems, often rather isolated and therefore under particular threat;
- communities which were poor and which had been reliant on subsistence agriculture but which were now changing, often rapidly, under pressure from tourism, which has brought threats as well as opportunities.

Again, clear development of any one of these themes, on its own, could have raised an answer towards the top of Level 2. The ecosystems theme and the community theme were the two most commonly chosen and they often allowed candidates to produce good work. Although the tectonic and glacial themes were less often developed they did tend to lead to very good work.

The main part of most answers concentrated on the question of the threats to the area. Once again there was a variety of possible approaches to this part of the answer although three of these were particularly common. These were:

1. the threat of abandoned rubbish polluting the area and its water supply and damaging the attractive environment which formed the basis of the tourist industry;
2. the threat of tourist pressure causing erosion in the popular areas and possibly leading to landslides, avalanches and damage to ecosystems (either through deliberate actions or by accident);
3. threats due to climate change.

With each of these themes there was a simple trap for candidates. This was the temptation to lift a lot of material from the AIB and to rely almost exclusively on this material without adding any of the candidate's own knowledge or understanding. Of course the better answers used the AIB information as a starting point for the development of interesting discussions of issues but weaker candidates wrote a lot without showing much originality of thought or development of ideas. Answers *could* gain low Level 2 marks by selecting AIB material sensibly and linking different extracts from the AIB to make a sensible argument but they had to go beyond this and show how their selected material fitted in to the whole field of their geographical study if they were to be awarded high Level 2 or Level 3 marks.

The third question which candidates addressed was the extent to which we should be concerned about the threat.

A large number of candidates dealt with this in a concluding paragraph. Most of these provided quite brief discussions although these discussions often rounded the answer off very nicely and summarised an argument that had been developing throughout the answer. Often such concluding paragraphs moved the mark up within Level 2 but sometimes they were enough to move it into Level 3.

A small proportion of candidates made this question into the major theme of their answer, and this proved problematic when it led to a very theoretical discussion which was not based on facts and examples. Candidates must be aware that the best answers to the high-mark questions on this paper *must* combine ideas with facts. When candidates try to develop complex ideas and arguments without reference to real cases and real places, as some did here, they are in danger of writing very 'woolly' answers which will not gain the marks that their authors might have hoped for.

However, having noted that problem which occurred in some answers, it needs to be emphasised that there were many very good answers and some excellent answers to this question. There was a higher proportion than usual (5.2%) of Level 3 answers and, within the Level 3, a pleasing number of answers gained maximum marks.

### Question 3

This question had an implied plan in its very structure. Most candidates followed this plan or adapted it sensibly. This meant that they almost all made sensible references to each of the several aspects of the question and so most candidates got at least to the top of Level 1 or into Level 2.

Most candidates wrote about local sources of energy first and included references to some or all of:

- biogas digesters
- solar cookers and/or water heaters
- solar panels and battery storage schemes
- mini-hydro schemes.

The majority of these candidates went on to make specific references to the social benefits and the economic benefits of these new sources. Some weaker answers failed to distinguish between the two

types of benefit although even these answers often had references to relevant ideas even if they did not quite show a clear understanding of 'social benefits' or 'economic benefits'.

The best answers often made reference to research done using the websites provided in the AIB, which provided a lot of useful information that precisely fitted the demands of this question. It was a little disappointing that more use was not made of such research and that many candidates totally failed to make use of this opportunity to show that they had done the research and use it sensibly in the relevant context. This failure led to a tendency towards over-reliance on the AIB as a source of information.

When candidates went on to write about the national scale they had less variety of schemes to write about, but the AIB did contain a lot of information about possible economic benefits of large-scale HEP development. Then candidates were generally able to apply their geographical understanding to develop ideas about possible social benefits. There were a lot of very solid answers to this part of the question.

Many candidates provided good, well-planned answers to this question. However, there was one issue that caused some concern; the extent of what might be regarded as the 'introduction' to many answers. Given that candidates were asked to write about the benefits of alternative sources of energy it was probably inevitable that many would start by writing about the problems with the sources used at present, thus allowing a contrast to be drawn later. When candidates wrote a concise paragraph to summarise some of the issues with the conventional sources this generally worked very well and allowed a natural development into the alternative sources.

Unfortunately it was not uncommon to find candidates writing a side or more about the present problems. This almost always led in to material that was clearly more relevant to the question set but, in quite a number of cases, it meant that later parts of this answer and/or the whole of Question 4 were very obviously hurried.

This problem of over-long introductions was not confined to seemingly less able or well prepared candidates, but often characterised candidates of seemingly high ability and diligent approach to their work who failed to prioritise in their planning process. Such candidates need to plan their use of time in the exam, keep to their timetable as they work through the paper and focus on the core demands of the questions, thereby giving themselves the best possible opportunity to translate their hard work into high marks.

As with Question 2 there were many very good answers and some excellent answers to this question. On this question 11% of candidates achieved Level 3 answers and, within the Level 3, a pleasing number of answers gained maximum marks.

## **Question 4**

Question 4 was probably the least predictable of all the questions on the paper – and so perhaps particularly tested candidates' abilities to think and react quickly. The question therefore differentiated well.

In fact it was perfectly possible to trawl the AIB and come up with two lists, one of guidelines for visitors and one of management strategies, that were already in place or proposed – and many candidates did this and wrote good Level 1 answers but could not progress beyond this without developing some original ideas.

Some very good answers used the UK's Countryside Code as a starting point for the development of guidelines for trekkers, whilst others used the Rock Climbers Code as a basis for guidelines for climbers in the Himalayas. Some other candidates had clearly thought about particular threats to the environment – to the ecosystem or to traditional communities for instance – and developed a series of interesting guidelines to deal with those threats.

Basic answers on the management aspect of the question often consisted of a list of things that should be banned. These often included ideas that might have led to the destruction, or severe limitation, of the tourist industry in general and the loss of an important income source for the country and the local area. The best answers suggested rules that needed to be laid down (or guidelines that

should be suggested) but then went on to give detailed consideration as to how these rules could be enforced. Such answers often involved the local people (Sherpas) in the management and policing of the tourists; thus providing another source of employment and income. Candidates demonstrated their awareness that the local people would have the best understanding of the needs of the local area, and probably the best understanding of the needs of the trekkers and mountaineers by working sensitively with all parties and producing long-term, sustainable solutions.

Even though this question was the last on the paper and despite it being more difficult to prepare for than many others, it is good to note that almost 4% of candidates achieved Level 3 marks and the mean mark was just over 8/15.