

Version



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

Geography

GEOG3

(Specification 2030)

Unit 3: Contemporary Geographical Issues

Report on the Examination

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General

This is the third summer report on the A2 GEOG3 paper since the current specification started. Consequently, unlike previous reports, it will not focus on aspects of the question paper and its construction, the nature and demands of command words and the importance of key words. Centres will now be well aware of the philosophy behind these elements of the assessment process. Hence this report's prime focus is now to provide feedback on the success of the examination paper as a whole, and question by question. 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.

A number of general characteristics were again evident:

1. The majority of candidates attempted two physical geography questions and one human geography question, with a significant proportion (47%) answering Question 19 (the Plate Tectonics essay question). The most popular set of questions overall were the structured questions (10, 11 and 12) testing the World Cities option.
2. There continue to be 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 candidates 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. 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. Centres are asked to consider whether 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 slight evidence that some candidates ran out of time, though not in large numbers, and hence poor time management may have contributed to lower marks for those concerned.
4. 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 requested to ask their candidates to write the numbers of the questions attempted on the front page, in numerical order, despite it saying 'For office use only' above the spaces for question numbers.

Also on a more administrative level, examiners noted an increased number of word-processed scripts. Centres are asked to ensure that these are printed with a relatively large font, and double-spaced. Further, there seem to be more instances of challenging handwriting. Candidates should be aware that if their points cannot be read, then there might be an impact on the mark awarded.

Finally, it is pleasing to report that the full range of marks was awarded which is encouraging as the purpose of all examination papers is to discriminate effectively between candidates as appropriate.

GEOG3 is an entirely optional paper, 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 text of Figure 4 – Question 10 - presented a certain issue - the direct 'lifting' of material - which may repeat itself in other options in subsequent series.

With this in mind, there is one other important general observation that needs to be made. For each of the 7 mark questions, candidates are presented with a stimulus that they are required to study, and **use** in their answers. The command word 'comment on' requires them to make a geographical inference based on the stimulus materials, but that inference should be based on something in the

Figure. In direct terms, the figure provided should be referred to repeatedly in the answers to the questions set on that stimulus; and in simple terms evidence from the Figure should be given to support a point being made.

The main part of this report will now examine salient points regarding each of the individual questions.

Question 01

Although there were some very well developed answers using a range of evidence to present an assessment of risks from a number of hazards, many answers were poorly linked to the evidence on the photo. They often mentioned the town Legazpi and Lagonoy Gulf but did little to link these to any particular risk such as 'proximity', or even quoting the distance from the volcano's crater. Many answers gave a whole catalogue of potential hazards. Some did try and work out what type of volcano it was and then got rather bogged down trying to decide whether it would be runny/viscous or fast/slow, quiet/explosive etc. Many failed to mention the channels or the previous flows, and few mentioned issues associated with evacuation. Wider impacts tended to drift into accounts of what hazards other, and obviously well-studied, volcanoes had caused; yet this question referred to the hazards presented by *this* volcano.

Question 02

Answers covered the whole range from the extremely superficial, barely recognisable as volcanoes, to very comprehensive descriptions with full explanation of shape/lava type etc. There were some excellent answers to this question, and equally some very simplistic.

Question 03

It is a truism that candidates are required to answer the question set and examiners commonly observe this in reports such as these. In this case, a *comparison* of the management of two contrasting volcanoes was required. However, despite this, the majority of answers were effectively two separate accounts, often in some detail. In these cases, the lack of explicit comparison restricted the mark awarded to mid-Level 2 – 6 marks. Furthermore, much of this detail was focused on impacts of the event rather than management of impacts or the volcano. Much of the management cited was very superficial: evacuation, aid, monitoring (or watching?) and it lacked depth of knowledge. Inevitably there was little comparison beyond the wealth factor/ability to deal with events. There were some highly detailed and purposeful comparative accounts, but they were rare.

Question 04

The majority of candidates were able to access Level 2 by providing a small additional number of pieces of evidence to suggest that the atmospheric conditions were those of an anticyclone – some were given in the stem of the question: 'calm' and 'summer'. Further credit at this level was awarded to comments as to why these conditions existed – such as references to atmospheric stability and pressure gradient.

A significant number of candidates were determined to see fog in the photo although it was not in evidence. However, examiners did credit references to 'mist', and its creation and/or its 'burning off'. Another significant weakness was the inability to recognise cloud types – in this case cirrus, or cirro-stratus. Bearing this in mind, and if correct identification was given, a very small number of candidates did suggest that a warm front was approaching, and this was credited.

Question 05

As with Question 02, this question was either done very well or in simple and/or incomplete terms. Most candidates interpreted 'origin' as 'formation', although a few did refer to different source areas of depression formation (note – not different sources of air masses). However, there was a lack of specific knowledge by many of the processes involved. Most could name Tm and Pm air masses but often did not refer to density as a factor in the frontal undercutting/uplift. Many mentioned the 'jet stream', but did not know what role this played. Here, there was some confusion with Rossby waves. Many answers spent time on describing weather changes which was irrelevant. The very clear explanations that did exist referred to: the jet stream and diverging air in the upper atmosphere, drawing air in/convergence at the surface of identified air masses, uplift and vortex creation, together with the development of a frontal system. This is largely text book material.

Question 06

Most candidates based their answers on the 'The Great Storm' which appeared to have a variety of dates of occurrence (1966, 1981, 1987, and 1997). Some gave detailed accounts of the impacts of the chosen event, although rarely located these other than in Southern England. The degree of detail tended to be less on responses, with statements such as clearing up, sending in emergency services to clear roads, repair electricity lines etc. Many referred to 'improvements were made by the government to weather forecasting', without giving much idea as to what they did.

A small number of centres had clearly studied alternative events – such as the floods in Cocker mouth in November 2009, and the 'Burns Night storm' of January 1990. In many cases the discussion of the chosen event referred to the (alleged) errors of prediction.

Question 07

There were some very good, quite sophisticated answers to this question where candidates did assess the management plan in the light of the rarity of species, but many just listed the types of protection and lifted data from the source. Better candidates did appreciate that the smaller sanctuaries might have been developed to protect the rarest species, and that small areas would be easier to manage and control. Also, that the resource use areas were large to allow the population to have some economic use sustainability without needing to encroach upon the fragile habitats contained on the island.

Question 08

The biome rainforest was most popular here, and some good detail on stratification took many answers to Level 2. However the naming of species of both flora and fauna was rarely referred to. This is an area where candidates need to 'raise their game' and move beyond simple and basic references to plants and animals – there was a disappointing level of detail. Further credit was awarded to details of the other aspects of the chosen biome – climate and soils. However, references to climate were broadly correct, but quite bland, with often just total rainfall and temperature ranges being offered. The answers based on the savanna grassland were similar though the acacia and baobab trees were described in a little more detail by better candidates, but here many answers drifted off into the impacts of humans.

Question 09

There were some quite strong answers, and equally some very weak ones; responses being somewhat polarised. Many candidates discussed the concept of sustainability in the context of development issues well, as well as the pressures, in their chosen biome. There were some good case studies of forest and palm oil issues in Malaysia and Indonesia as well as the more usual issues relating to Amazon Basin exploitation. Some just described environmental degradation without relating these to particular issues. Where linkage to the potential for sustainability was implicit Level 2 credit was awarded, and where there was detailed (and contextualised) explicit linkage, Level 3 was awarded.

Question 10

The aim of this question was to use a text stimulus to classify the development of a transport system – that of Freiburg – as being integrated, efficient and sustainable. Many chose to ignore this instruction. Consequently, there was a lot of data lift/repetition without really addressing the key themes. Most answers did eventually offer some suggestion as to how this system aided sustainability, but few candidates really understood integration or could do much more than quote improvements/comfort/extension as indicators of efficient. There was a lot of reference to other cities, e.g. Metrolink in Manchester and Curitiba, but this did not add to analysis here.

Question 11

There were some high scoring and very thorough answers to this question displaying good knowledge of a range of strategies, though many candidates got rather too focused on recycling to the exclusion of other strategies. Many of these referred to Curitiba and/or Cairo, but ended up describing very similar strategies, as it was only the collection method of waste materials that was different. A number of answers were too superficial with the briefest mention of methods, quickly stated and passed on.

Many referred to 'reduce, reuse, recycle' as an approach but then failed to deliver any detail. A number also ignored the urban focus of the question and gave vague accounts of national strategies or strategies employed by supermarkets such as Tesco and Mark & Spencer.

Question 12

This question again created some concern for examiners, as it did when a similar question was set in 2011. The key here was for the candidate to select **one or more** appropriate partnership scheme in the regeneration of urban areas, and to then evaluate its success. At the outset some candidates chose inappropriate schemes by choosing to write about Urban Development Corporations such as the London Docklands (LDDC), and the Merseyside Development Corporation (Albert Dock) – schemes which were rooted in the early 1980s and which were **not** partnerships. The specification makes a very clear distinction between gentrification, property-led regeneration schemes [the Urban Development Corporations (UDCs)] and partnership schemes. Partnership schemes were set up from the 1990s onwards with a clear difference in philosophy from the UDCs of the 1980s - namely to purposefully involve local communities and local government in the decision-making processes.

Hence the decision was taken again to award credit for discussions on the UDCs to the maximum of Level 1, assuming there was sufficient material to merit it. This decision was taken so as to be fair to both sets of candidates – those who knew something of an inappropriate scheme, and those who interpreted the question correctly. The same principles applied to gentrification, and to those answers based on improvements to spontaneous settlements in the developing world such as Dharavi in Mumbai. A key element was also the candidate's ability to state who the partners were; even for some UDCs it was possible to state that more recent developments in the same area had a partnership element to them. An example of this is the recent developments within and around the Castlefields area of Manchester.

With few exceptions most answers to all scenarios 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, the 'partners' and its aims, other than very general points. Success was difficult to evaluate; often there were no criteria against which it could be judged. Some 'schemes' were still in the planning or building phase and it is almost impossible to assess how successful they might be. Others were 'city-wide' and included different approaches from different time periods; hence it was difficult to tease out parts that were creditworthy. Centres do need to select a scheme that has tangible outcomes; this would have been so much easier if candidates had looked at a case study that has, or almost has, run its course. There is a huge range of such schemes within the UK and around the world, but a key differentiating element has to be the candidate's ability to categorise the appropriate scheme under the correct heading.

Question 13

This stimulus, more than the others perhaps, produced a significant amount of non-specific speculation in locations beyond the area shown in the photograph. The photograph shows part of the exploitation of the Canadian tar sands by Royal Dutch Shell, and there were plenty of opportunities to comment on the socio-economic and environmental impacts evident in the area shown. However, again, there was much speculation of impacts on the national or global scale including references to oil/petrol prices in Canada, the exploitation of the local indigenous population by a TNC as well as the obligatory global warming. Most candidates did eventually spot 'fumes' or 'smoke' and also went on to suggest that the river ecosystem might be damaged. Surprisingly few commented on the damage caused by the extraction in the foreground.

Candidates really should say 'what I can see' and then try to make some sense of it in the context of the source.

Question 14

There was a lot of confusion between 'spatial organisation' and 'location' in most answers to this question, and consequently it was not very well done. The vast majority of answers simply described where TNCs are located together with reasons for those locations rather than thinking about how TNCs organised their business model within the context of the whole company. Many acquired Level 2 almost by accident in that they had mentioned HQs (in the home base) and plants (in NICs) with some reasons. Very few appreciated that firms locate abroad to take advantage of cheap labour because

their manufacturing processes are often very labour intensive and this allows them to achieve higher profits. They could offer some reasons for plants overseas, but rarely developed points about HQ/R&D or regional marketing/management centres. It is difficult to see how the topic of a case study of a TNC, as required by the specification, could have been taught without reference to its spatial organisation. Is it just a case of conceptual understanding perhaps, or the lack of it?

Question 15

Many had difficulty with this because they approached it on a micro-scale of one company. It was done much better by those who took a national or even developed country versus developing country stance. The weaker answer ignored the *versus* element of the statement and did not discuss the degree of compatibility between the two concepts.

Better answers did argue that although economic growth often occurred at the expense of environmental impact, it was possible to have sustainability in both, but perhaps not on the same scale (for very good answers). Some of the stronger answers made good use of support material, such as the economic growth in China and its environmental impact, and also references to different types of tourism and their impact in different parts of the world.

Question 16

There were some mixed answers to this question. Weaker candidates tended to repeat the data with no elaboration; some thought the question was about the tensions between the states in trying to separate from each other. However there were some good answers with a clear focus and appreciation of the significance of both religious and linguistic differences between some (or all) of these states and the main part of India. Remoteness and isolation were also developed as themes for the reasons for separatist pressures, as was reference to insurgent groups (or the lack of them) regarding the nature of the pressures.

Question 17

In common with the other 8 mark questions on the paper, there was a wide range of responses to this question. There were some excellent responses which referred to a range of resolution processes together with supportive material as to where such processes had, or were being, operated. The best answers dealt with the topic at a variety of scales – from planning processes for local conflict scenarios in the UK, to more international processes such as peace keeping and diplomacy, including some encouraging references to very contemporary conflicts such as those evidenced in the Arab Spring and Syria. Some weaker answers dealt with more violent means of resolution with some lengthy answers on war – in such cases it was not always easy to see how ‘resolution’ would occur.

Question 18

There were some very lengthy answers on the impacts of an international conflict on an area; with many based on Israel/Palestine, Darfur (including some confusion with the creation of South Sudan) and Afghanistan. However, in many cases it was difficult to tease out the precise impact of the conflict on the environment, as required by the question. For some conflicts, notably the Israel/Palestine and Afghanistan conflicts, there was some confusion regarding issues that were arising (or already present) in the conflict zone, rather than being the outcome of the conflict. For example, many candidates wrote of issues related to water supply in Gaza and the West Bank. The issues cited were not necessarily a direct/indirect effect of the conflict. It may be true that water supply/drought problems have been worsened by the conflict but candidates did not state or suggest reasons for this – they tended to describe an environmental problem that existed before the conflict had begun, and was due to other factors. Similar points arose in some discussions regarding the actions of the Taliban in Afghanistan – again before any conflict had taken place. Deforestation was often quoted as an issue but, for many, there was no indication as to how the conflict had increased the demand for timber or land to be cleared of woodland. There were also many references to poppy growing in Afghanistan without any clear ideas as to how the conflict was responsible for this practice, or what the impact of its growth was on the environment. The ideas were not joined-up, and possibly candidates were using material suitable for another question. Some, of course, failed to focus on environmental issues and wrote at length on economic and/or social issues.

The essays

Centres are reminded that 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 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 broad 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 find the middle line, or be obliged to follow the accepted view. 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 candidates can synthesise geographical themes and recognise the roles of values, attitudes and the importance of decision making at a variety of levels
- Quality of argument; the degree to which an argument is constructed, developed and concluded.

It is pleasing to report that a wide range of responses was evident in these essays – with full marks being awarded on several occasions. As an exercise in discrimination, they were successful, and some candidates are to be congratulated on the quality of their responses to these questions. It is wonderful to behold the depth of intellectual thought and processing, combined with an accuracy of knowledge, and an ability to write in a targeted and interesting manner that some candidates possess. This augurs well for the future of the subject.

As was pointed out earlier, Question 19 was by far the most popular, whereas Question 20 was the least popular. In terms of the human essays, Question 22 was the most popular.

Question 19

Most did this quite well in that they saw the theme clearly enough and could attempt some link between plate tectonics theory and volcanic/seismic activity, sometimes with case studies or at least examples that named the tectonic plates involved. Some answers went rather too far into discussion of impacts and responses to individual events. Synopticity was a challenge for some – examiners were looking for some aspects of complexity regarding the evidence of plate tectonic theory, such as different types of sources, and changes over time. Or, they were looking for other factors that might be the cause of volcanic/seismic events, such as water bodies, or 'fracking', or factors which may influence their distribution, for example geological (fault structures) or distance from origin. Many candidates wanted to just give a straightforward response to the command word 'evaluate', and hence weaker answers stuck closely to plate margins and did not venture into hotspots or other non-margin activity. Even those who did refer to the Hawaiian hot spot did not use it to its full potential to show how tectonic theory can be supported.

It is perhaps inevitable that spelling errors predominate in this question with frequent references to Wegner, (Richard and Robert) Wagner and Wenger as a well-known scientist (Wegener), and to Pandora, Pancras and Panacea as the one time supercontinent (Pangaea).

Question 20

Interestingly, this essay question had the lowest mean mark at 18, and yet the highest standard deviation, which indicates that candidates either had a reasonably good grasp of this topic, or they did not. Some of the weakest answers on the whole paper were here. Once they had chosen a region some candidates felt obliged to 'sit on the fence' and attribute the characteristics to both Sub Tropical Anticyclones (STA) and Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) in a balanced manner, even when it was clear that they did not play an equal role. So, some answers were difficult to make sense of. Coupled with this, for several there was a total misunderstanding as to how the ITCZ and STA actually work to influence climatic conditions. There were some quite long answers where the candidates tied themselves in knots trying to explain where the sun was in relation to the equator and the tropical wet/dry area, for example. On the other hand, there were some excellent responses based on the Indian monsoon.

Question 21

There were some very good answers with detailed material on longer term natural succession changes, climatic climax vegetation together with exemplars of plagioclimaxes and even some discussion of subtle physical and human influences in the development of sub-climax forms, such as on wasteland or along routeways. Weaker candidates' answers were generalised, often quite theoretical answers about the balance between man and the environment. These views were usually summarised in a basic way stating that both factors are of 'equal importance', without any effort to consider any variations in the British Isles. Case studies were not used very often apart from references to a few conservation 'favourites' like Troopers Hill and Dulwich Upper Wood, but even then they could not fit this into the demands of the question very well. The central tenet of the question- 'relative roles' - was addressed well by a minority.

Question 22

This was a seemingly comfortable area for many candidates. Many answers were of course based upon Merry Hill, Bluewater or The Trafford Centre; and candidates can present lots of information about their reasons for development and their facilities/attractions. They all seem to have 10 000 parking spaces; is this a planning requirement? Unfortunately answers were less forthcoming about the impacts on neighbouring town/city centres. Such comments were often very generalised and superficial. Touchwood was a popular development for neighbouring town/city centre regeneration, not often expressed as a 'fight back' as many candidates did seem to be unaware as to what Touchwood might be fighting back against. Some thought that it had been connected to Merry Hill, physically. Very few candidates mentioned 'other services'.

Out of town centre developments were often seen in isolation and little connection was made to their role in stimulating a response from city centres. Indeed, for many, the outcome was decay and deprivation in central areas. Candidates generally were of the opinion that decentralisation had had a major impact, but in a straightforward way. Some tried to argue that transport had decentralised because lines extended out to places like St Ives.

Some candidates attempted to twist the direction of the question to one of urban regeneration. There are some elements of overlap, but not when discussing the impact of the London Docklands and the Albert Dock. Some also raised the issue of e-commerce; is this decentralisation too? It has added to the decline of some areas but as it was never in the centre to begin it can't be classed as decentralisation (except where the focus of administration and/or delivery is stated to be in out-of-town locations). However, it is a wider synoptic point that could be used to illustrate why the 'high street' is on the decline nationally and more so in certain concentrated areas such as north western England.

Question 23

This question yielded some of the highest performing answers with 10% of them gaining 35 marks or more. Perhaps the context made it easier to come to a view that could be 'either way', as long as it was supported. Very good answers went through the whole repertoire of the growth of Asian Tigers, the rise of China and India, and the other BRICS, movement to other 'emerging' NICs and the economic growth of the Gulf oil states, plus recent economic moves by China in parts of Africa. It is a pity that in this latter aspect, 'Africa' was as detailed as it got. Several candidates brought the discussion up-to-date with accounts of the Eurozone crisis, and the impact this may have on the global economy – this is to be commended. There is some evidence to suggest that the global economy is

'going home' again – to the MEDCs – to an area of supposed stability. Many candidates did know a lot of material, and wrote extensively. On the other hand there were some candidates who were not entirely sure who, or what, the Asian Tigers were at the outset; clearly an issue for this question. Some thought China and India were included and this rather undermined their argument. Japan was also a regular 'participant'.

There was also some evidence of pre-prepared answers to a previous question based on TNCs, such as stating that Sony was an Asian Tiger and then basing the whole answer on TNCs. Such 'lateral' thinking is not appropriate in this situation. However, references to an alternative analogy - the 'Flying Geese' model, representing the burgeoning growth of south-east Asian economies – were interesting.

Question 24

The aim of this question was to examine the geographical impact of conflict in its widest sense. The study of a number of conflicts is required in this option, and hence it is disappointing to report that the great majority of answers referred to just one conflict. Most answers dealt with Israel/Palestine and/or Afghanistan, with a few centre-specific sorties into the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The weakest answers dealt only with war and often failed to differentiate the impacts of the conflict from other endemic background factors and issues (see Question 18 above). It is difficult to consider the question 'to what extent do you agree with this statement' if only one or two war-based conflicts are considered.

Better answers did consider conflict at a variety of scales, where the impacts may be rather different, and/or less 'significant'. So, there were answers referring to the Basques, Scotland, the Kurds, and local planning issues. The problem with these, and certainly an issue for some of the weaker candidates, was the ability to tease out impacts of the conflict itself rather than simply issues caused by the existence or resolution of the conflict. For example, candidates referred to potential impacts of the Newbury by-pass before it was built. These were not caused by the conflict per se – they were part of the proposal and hence what caused the conflict in the first place.

As with all of the above questions, candidates need to think about the specific requirements of the question before setting out each case study in graphic detail.