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Examiners' Report
June 2010

GCE Geography 6GE03

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June 2010

Publications Code UA023951

Introduction

This was the second examination of Unit 3 Contested Planet, with an entry in excess of 7000 (compared to around 3000 in January 2010).

Direct comparisons with January 2010 in terms of question popularity are not possible because of the changing Section B topic (Biodiversity under Threat in June 2010). However, centres may be interested to know that the choice of Section A questions by candidate breaks down as follows:

- Energy Security = 31%
- Water Conflicts = 25%
- Superpower Geographies = 24%
- Bridging the Development Gap = 13%
- The Technological Fix? = 7%

The Energy and Water choices were similarly popular in January 2010. It is very positive to note that a large number of candidates chose to answer the Superpower Geographies question. Many of the responses to this question were very good, demonstrating interesting and up-to-date knowledge and understanding.

Overall, performance across Unit 3 was of a comparable standard to the January series. The vast majority of candidates obeyed the rubric of the question paper and provided full answers. Centres should note that it is important that in Section A, candidates answer in the separate spaces provided for their first and second choice questions. As might be expected many A2 candidates produced carefully structured, detailed and evaluative answers that in many cases were impressive. Real-world, contemporary understanding is at the heart of this Unit and it was provided by many candidates.

Whilst not major issues, centres might wish to consider the following points which emerged from a small number of scripts where candidates were perhaps confusing the demands of Sections A and B within Unit 3 and even with Unit 4:

- Sub-headings, as might be used in the Unit 4 report, are not required in Unit 3.
- Unit 4 style sourcing/referencing is not required in Unit 3 Section A; it might be used in Section B if candidates wish to refer to their own research on the Issues Analysis topic or to refer to Figures in the Resources Booklet.
- Planning, while important, is sometimes overdone. Unit 4 style plans for each sub-question in Section A and B are not advisable because of time constraints.

In terms of general advice for future series, the following provides a summary of key messages centres and candidates may like to consider.

Section A:

- Some candidates spent too long on the 10 mark data stimulus question. In some cases candidates write 3-4 sides for the 10 mark part (a) and perhaps less than 2 sides for the 15 mark part (b).

- The 10 mark (a) part should focus on an explanation of the Figure referred to; candidates who provide overly long, general introductions to the topic and/or excessively long case studies are unlikely to focus on the question asked.
- Data stimulus skills were stronger than in January, although partial explanations, description and incomplete coverage of the Figures are issues which prevent candidates achieving higher marks.
- Some key words, such as 'consequences' are interpreted in a one-sided way ie as negative consequences rather than positive and negative.
- In some 15 mark part (b) questions, there is a tendency to be over-reliant on learnt case studies which are simply transcribed, rather than being selectively adapted and applied to the specific question. This is particularly an issue with Water Conflicts.

Section B:

- Candidates should ensure they leave enough time to complete all questions in Section B. The small number of candidates who misjudge their time tend to do so by not completing Question 6 (c).
- Level 3 and Level 4 marks in Section B will always require candidates to demonstrate synopticity and evaluation skills.
- As Section B is based on pre-released resources there is always a danger of 'question spotting', which sometimes works but more often does not.
- Detailed preparation, to develop an in-depth understanding of the Issues Analysis resources is essential; a small minority of candidates were seemingly studying the resources for the first time as they sat their exam.

Comments on Individual Questions

This report will provide exemplification of candidates' work, together with tips and/or comments, for a selection of questions. The exemplification will come mainly from questions which required more complex responses from candidates.

Section A

Question 1 Energy Security

This popular question was often completed successfully. Candidates generally interpreted Figure 1 correctly, recognising that the figure referred to electricity demand not total energy demand. The least successful answers focused on general impacts rather than environmental consequences.

Candidates needed to recognize that consequences, like impacts, can be both positive and negative. Less able candidates also focused on very general ideas of 'pollution' and 'global warming', whereas others focused on the specific environmental consequences of rising coal use, eg acid precipitation from 'dirty' Chinese coal, or the possible consequences of an increase in opencast coal mining.

Some candidates were sidetracked by the recent BP oil leak, often losing focus on the question. Candidates also described the graph and/or explained the trends whereas the question asked them to explain the environmental consequences of the trends shown.

The main issue in 1(b) was that the question asked candidates to focus on the reasons for energy uncertainty, whereas many actually focused on either why some nations are energy insecure or how nations could become more energy secure. The best explored the complexities of uncertainty (peak oil, geopolitical issues, emerging energy technologies, demand uncertainty) very successfully.

Question 2 Water Conflicts

Question 2(a) was a popular choice. Candidates might have been expected to be very familiar with the hydrological cycle which they were asked to refer to. Many responses outlined at range of ways in which humans could interfere with water supply but failed to make good links to the hydrological cycle. Many answers focused on pollution and dams with little reference to hydrological cycle processes. Stronger responses were those which focused on parts of the cycle and used examples to back up their assertions on processes. This part of question 2 often quickly became 'my case of a dam' and candidates drifted away from the data stimulus skills focus of the question.

Perhaps because of the discrete, easily learned nature of 'water case' studies many answers to question 2(b) focused on describing the conflicts that exist in the Middle East, Africa and USA. In some cases, case studies formed the entirety of answers. Better responses recognized the need to identify which water supply situations might escalate into conflict, and which could be solved through negotiation and agreement.

Stronger responses differentiated between internal water supply and transboundary situations and some made a convincing case for climate change being a driver in potential conflict. Some candidates were clearly answering a question along the lines of 'describe a range of water conflicts' rather than considering the actual question.

Question 3 Superpower Geographies

Question 3 was pleasingly popular. There were many very good answers which demonstrated sound real-world understanding. In addition there were a significant number of superb answers. Together these seem to suggest that superpowers is a topic many candidates (and their teachers) are very engaged with.

In this question 3(a) most candidates made good use of Figure 3 and were willing to bring in their ideas, facts, figures and theories. Cultural power was explored in depth with candidates making good use of their knowledge of the media eg Bollywood in India or the dominance of US media giants such as CNN and Disney. At the top end there were some excellent answers on the political power of the USA via IGOS such as the UN or IMF. Knowledge of the geography and economic of the US military was often very good.

In 3(b), most answers were focused on China and then Russia, with India and Brazil less often mentioned. Thematic or country by country approaches were both successful. India's very large population (and therefore economic potential) was mentioned but its role in the hi-tech economy was undervalued.

Some candidates used China's growing investment in Africa as a key point in shifting global power whilst others discussed the overwhelming cultural power of the USA which was unlikely to be toppled in the near future. Many candidates seem to have had a 'hang on a minute' moment when answering question 3(b), such that after outlining the strengths of China and Russia they moved on to evaluate their weaknesses as well as the continuing strengths of the USA. This ability to discuss the other side of the debate was much more common in question 3 than in question 1 or 2. This is of course, a key characteristic of a strong candidate.

Question 4 Bridging the Development Gap

Good understanding was often seen in responses to 4(a). Many candidates related the map shown in Figure 4 to concepts of core versus periphery and thus some good theoretical content was seen. Many wider examples were used in support such as the Caste system in India and apartheid in South Africa. Most seemed to have a good grasp of the reasons for rural poverty, and the results of discrimination against women and religious groups. There were a number of issues however:

- Some candidates almost completely ignored Fig 4 and instead only discussed other examples of development variation.
- The low poverty level in Dhaka confused some, as they considered the capital to consist only of slums.
- Bangladesh was sometimes taken to be an Indian province rather than a country.

In 4(b), answers tended to be of the 'top-down bad, bottom-up good' variety or else did see the complexities and moved into a more genuine evaluation. Some case studies such as Ghana's Akosombo dam, while clearly top-down, are perhaps due form retirement.

This example was opened in 1965, considerably before the candidates (and many of their parents) were born. Carefully chosen, up to date examples are vital for this part of the specification and it is important that candidates examine whether the development schemes they have been studying have been successful using a wide range of criteria.

Question 5 The Technological Fix?

As in January 2010 question 5 was the most polarized on the exam paper. It appeared to attract either candidates who sought it out specifically or those who stumbled into it having failed to be attracted by other questions. Overall question 5(a) was completed satisfactorily by most, although a number relied too heavily on figure 5. The humans and environmental sides of the question were covered in terms of positives and negatives, although some claimed that taxing had 'the exact opposite' impact compared to subsidizing. A minority of candidates provided very full discussions and these usually had a very good understanding of the externalities of technology.

Question 5(b) was similarly variable. Less able candidates tended to see the technology gap as widening constantly but provided little support for this view that was related directly to technology. Others could see that the question was tempting a discussion of both the widening technology gap (digital divide, or health care access) and the view that it is also narrowing (technological leapfrogging). These responses recognized and illustrated a complex pattern.

Examples of Examination Techniques

This example of a candidate's response shows the opening few paragraphs of their answer to question 1(a). It is a good example of a candidate focussing on the question set.

a) Environmental consequences are the effects on the natural world which could arise due to a particular product, system or way of living.

Figure 1. shows that global electricity consumption is expected to increase each decade until 2050, rising from 45 exajoules in 2000 to 165 exajoules by 2050.

This is likely to bring both positive and negative environmental impacts. The use of fossil fuels increases only marginally and natural gas and oil actually go down. This is likely to be caused by a lack of supply as these finite resources are limited. Environmentally their continued use will lead to further air and water pollution and higher CO_2 emissions which could enhance the effects of global warming and damage our ecosystems and life further.

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Examiner Comments

This candidate immediately focuses on the key phrase 'environmental consequences' which is part of the question. A definition follows, plus a recognition that consequences can be positive or negative.

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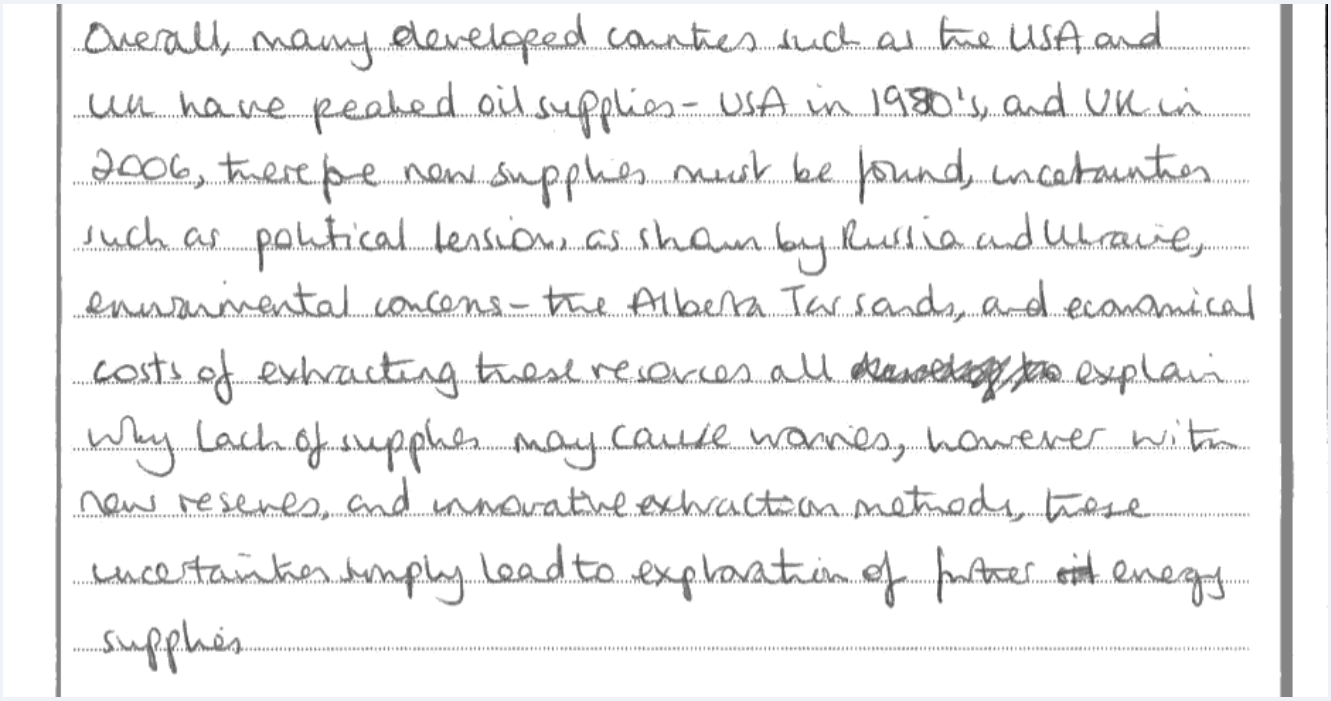
Examiner Tip

Avoid writing long, rambling introductions especially to the 10 mark data stimulus questions. As soon as you can, begin explaining the data in the Figure you have been asked to refer to.

For the 15 mark '(b)' sub-questions in Section A, the most common command words used are 'assess' and 'evaluate'. A conclusion can be a useful tool to come to a final judgement having weighed-up both sides of the argument. Conclusions do not need to be long, but they show the examiner that having considered the question from several angles you are now prepared to provide an overview.


Overall, many developed countries such as the USA and UK have peaked oil supplies - USA in 1980's, and UK in 2006, therefore new supplies must be found, uncertainties such as political tension, as shown by Russia and Ukraine, environmental concerns - the Alberta Tar sands, and economical costs of extracting these resources all explain why lack of supplies may cause worries, however with new reserves, and innovative extraction methods, these uncertainties simply lead to exploration of later energy supplies

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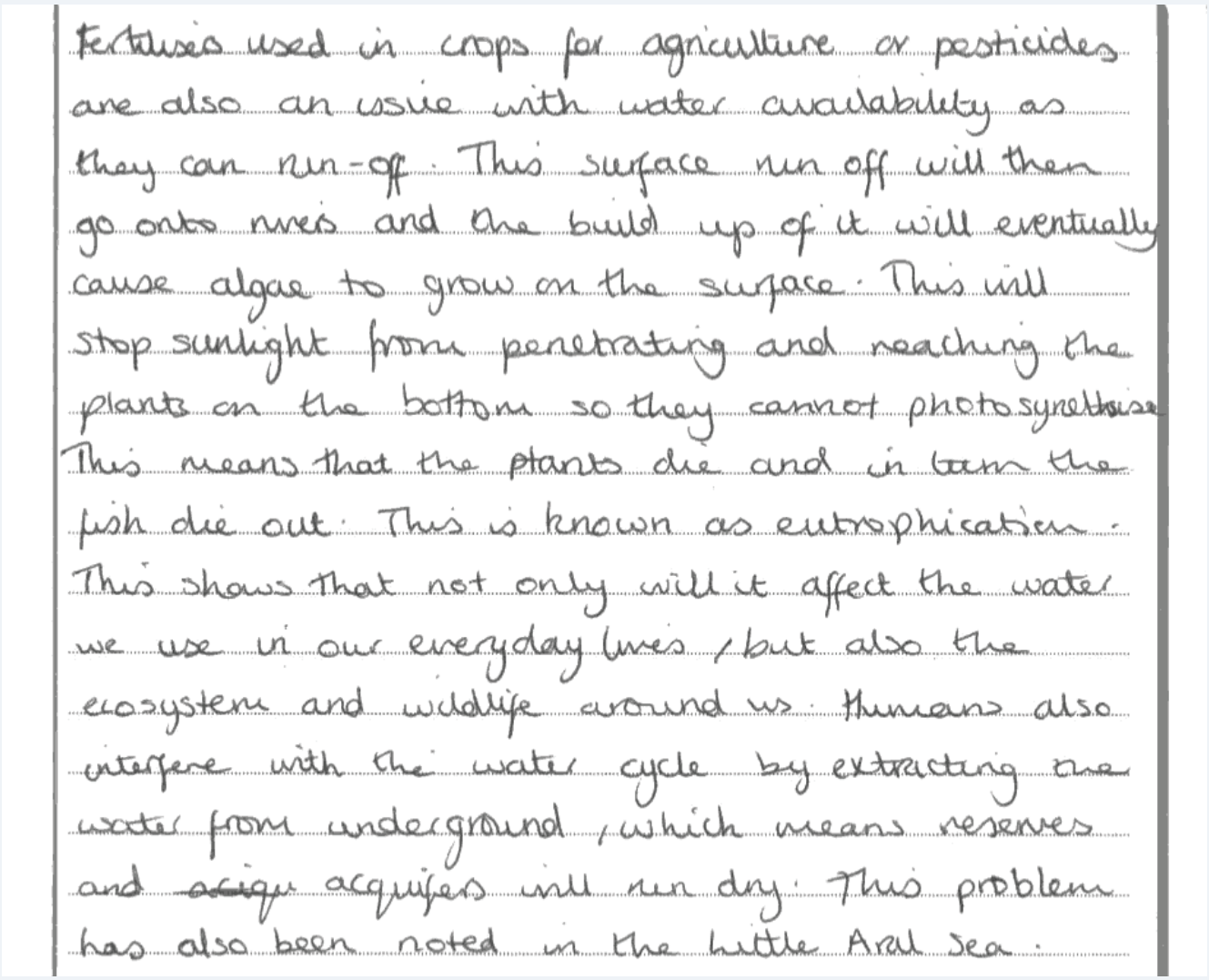
Examiner Comments

This conclusion makes reference to several key uncertainties in terms of energy futures, such as peak oil, political and environmental concerns. Notice how at the very end, the candidate recognises that there are some forces at work to reduce energy uncertainty.

ResultsPlus
Examiner Tip

The example on a conclusion shown here is about the length you should aim for.

An important aspect of Geography at A2 level is being specific enough. Avoid very general terms such as 'pollution' (which could be air, water or land - plus many sub-types).



Fertilisers used in crops for agriculture or pesticides are also an issue with water availability as they can run-off. This surface run off will then go onto rivers and the build up of it will eventually cause algae to grow on the surface. This will stop sunlight from penetrating and reaching the plants on the bottom so they cannot photosynthesise. This means that the plants die and in turn the fish die out. This is known as eutrophication. This shows that not only will it affect the water we use in our everyday lives, but also the ecosystem and wildlife around us. Humans also interfere with the water cycle by extracting the water from underground, which means reserves and ~~acqu~~ aquifers will run dry. This problem has also been noted in the little Aral Sea.

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Examiner Comments

This example is quite specific about pollution, referring to fertilisers and pesticides. It also explains how these get into water supply, and the consequences of this. There is also reference to the water cycle, ie the Figure the question referred to.

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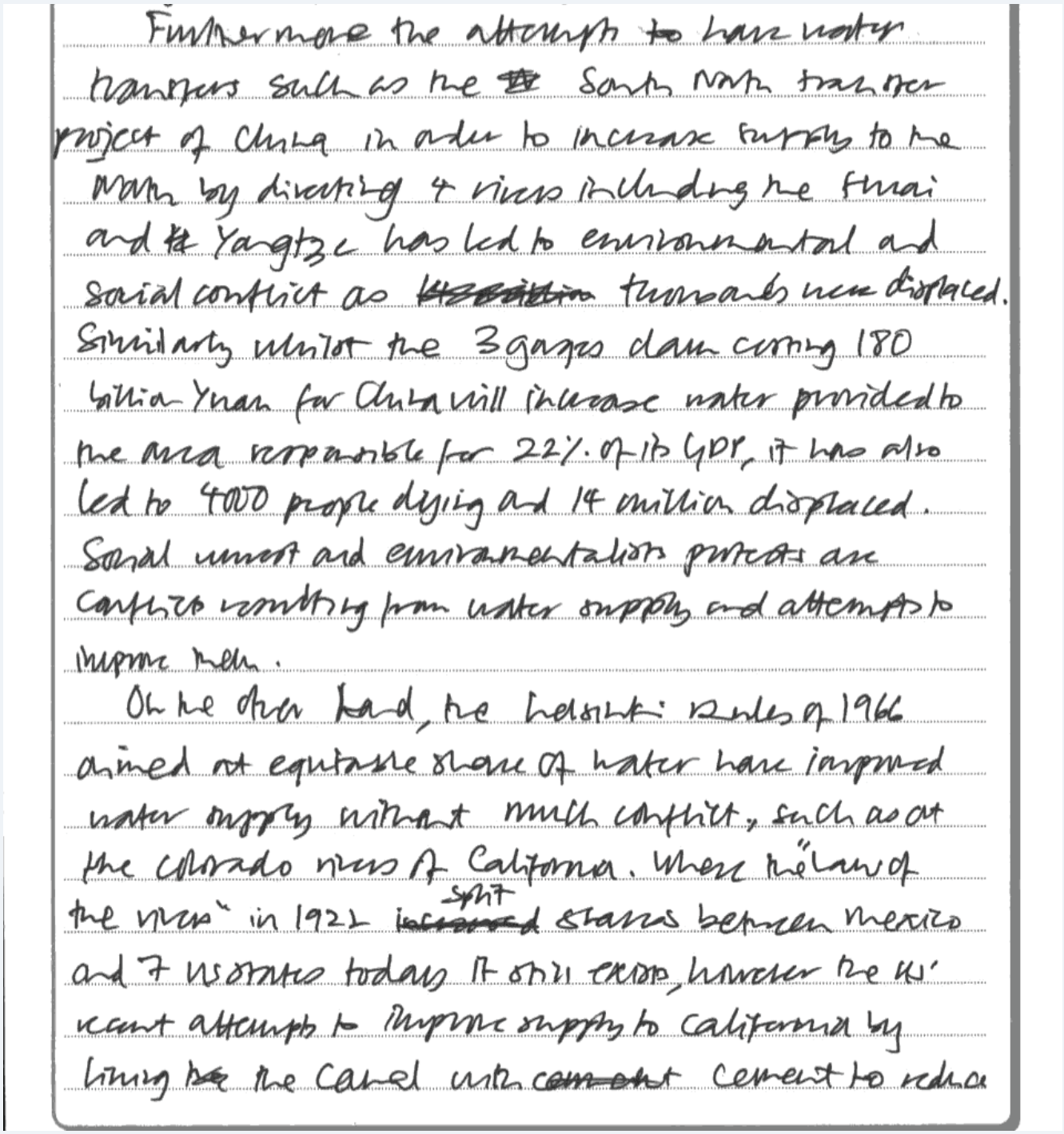
Examiner Tip

Think carefully about the topic you are answering a question on, and remember to use appropriate geographical language. In the case of this water question, terms such as infiltration, over-abstraction and saltwater incursion.

In question 2(b), the water question, case studies were often used very heavily. Case studies should take up perhaps half of one side. Often they run to 1-2 sides. A case study of this length is likely to be very descriptive and poorly linked to the actual question. Successful use of case studies is selective use. Selecting the right case study and then selecting which specific information to use. Writing 'everything you know' about the Three Gorges Dam is very unlikely to answer the question.



Furthermore the attempts to have water transfers such as the South North transfer project of China in order to increase supply to the north by diverting 4 rivers including the Huai and the Yangtze has led to environmental and social conflict as thousands were displaced. Similarly whilst the 3 gorges dam saving 180 billion Yuan for China will increase water provided to the area responsible for 22% of its GDP, it has also led to 4000 people dying and 14 million displaced. Social unrest and environmentalists protests are conflicts resulting from water supply and attempts to improve them.

On the other hand, the Helsinki Rules of 1966 aimed at equitable share of water have improved water supply without much conflict, such as at the Colorado River of California. Where "Law of the River" in 1921 split shares between Mexico and 7 US states today. It still exists, however the US' recent attempts to improve supply to California by lining the Canal with cement to reduce

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Examiner Comments

In this example the Three Gorges Dam is used as a case study but it is kept fairly brief and to the point. Notice as well that the candidate provides a brief summative sentence which refers to conflict. They are also using good evaluative language, recognising that conflict over water supply is not inevitable

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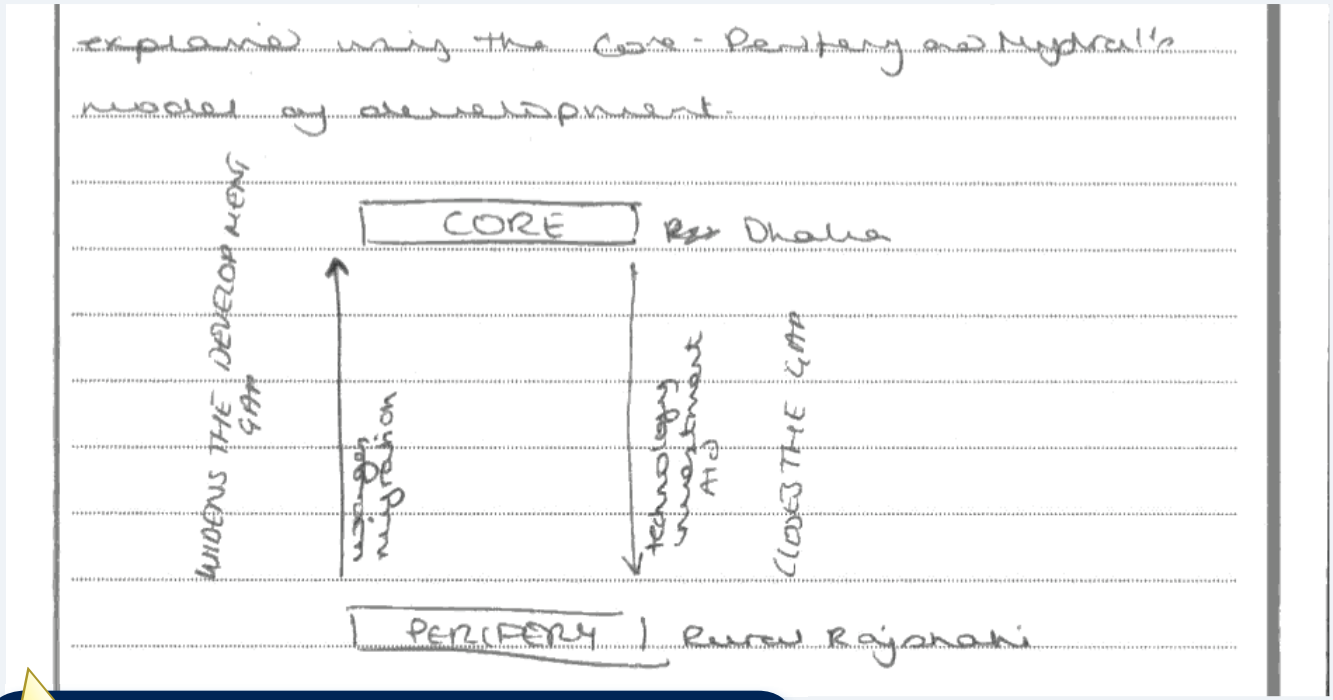
Examiner Tip

Some key facts and figures are always useful, but they need to be realistic and accurate. The 14 million people displaced quoted in this example is not accurate.

It can be useful to include diagrams within answers. These should be drawn in blue or black ink. They should be quick to draw and add something to the answer. Models are the most common type of diagram seen and they are often used successfully. It is often easier to draw a very quick sketch of the Rostow model than it is to explain in it words. The golden rule is keep your diagrams simple.

TNCs such as Disney and MacDonalds are most likely to set up branches or factories as ~~pop~~ the economy of scale is the biggest. This means there is ~~the~~ a high number of people, creating enough workers and a large area market to make TNC presence financially viable. Dhaka has a population of ~~29~~ 12 million, and this is growing rapidly each year due to high natural increase and rural-urban migration.

Rajshahi region in Figure 4 has the highest regional poverty percentage of 51-60%. This could be due to poor infrastructure linking Rajshahi and the Dhaka region. Rural poverty rate is also shown at 55%, 5% higher than the national average. This can be



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Examiner Comments

This candidate is answering question 4(a). There is a sound explanation of why Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has relatively low poverty levels due to FDI. We then move on to an explanation of rural poverty and as part of this a model is successfully used; notice that it is adapted to fit the question.

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Examiner Tip

Notice that in the text the candidate refers to the 'core-periphery' and 'Myrdal's' model. It is not 100% clear which model has been drawn. A title next to the diagram would have made this clearer.

Question 3(b) focussed on the extent to which the BRICs threaten the superpower status of the USA. There are several different ways this question could be answered. The most obvious is perhaps to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each BRIC in turn. Less obvious, but just as acceptable, would be to examine by theme, e.g. population, economy, global influence, energy – only referring to specific BRICs when relevant to the theme. It is always useful to pause (and plan) before you start your answer. Consider how it could be structured.

Also the BRIC's are beginning to outnumber the USA in terms of population size. It is predicted that by 2050 half of the worlds population will live in India & China alone. This huge number of people will allow the countries military and economic influence to became even stronger.

To some extent however, these developing countries have a long way to go to reach the USA's status. America believes that due to it's current capabilities along with its research capabilities in the quarternary industry, and its incredibly strong currency (the whole world holds reserves in dollars), they will be able to maintain their super power status.

Although Americas cultural dominance is high, the BRIC's are rapidly challenging this. for example the top 100 companies in the world 80 were in china & india. with the rapid expenential population growth within these two countries, their cultural influence is bound to increase, with the likelihood of the languages being used worldwide, challenging the English language.

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This example, part of a Level 4 response, use population as a theme. In the second paragraph 'to what extent' is addressed directly as the answer argues that the USA has some key strengths that the BRICs do not have. Cultural influence is the next theme and the response returns to the strengths of the BRICs. The whole answer is evaluative, looking at both sides in order to move towards a conclusion.

Question 6

Question 6 was based on the pre-release Issues Analysis resources 'The Pacific SIDS (Small Island Developing States): Biodiversity Under Threat'.

Overall there was evidence of good preparation in centres and none of the questions in the examination seemed to 'throw' candidates. The vast majority were able to provide full answers to all parts of question 6. As in January 2010, synopticity is important to access the Level 3 and Level 4 parts of the mark scheme. Some candidates rely too much on the resources in front of them; others try too hard to be synoptic and 'force' in parallel examples and models which add very little as they do not fit the question asked. Comparing the Pacific SIDS to Devon or Alaska may work, but often the Galapagos or St Lucia would have been more convincing parallel examples.

Question 6 (a) was perhaps the most surprising in terms of the responses seen. Many candidates failed to focus on explaining why the Pacific SIDS are areas of high biodiversity. There was often a focus on one or two factors such as isolation and relatively low populations.

Physical factors such as endemism and lack of limiting factors for growth were seen much less frequently. Often these factors would be mentioned but not fully explained. Explanations of how isolation can lead to evolution of new species were rare. The terminology of biomes and biological processes was lacking in many answers. In addition some candidates focused wholly on coral reefs and omitted to mention the importance of terrestrial biodiversity.

There was also quite frequent misunderstanding of the concept of a biodiversity hotspot. These are locations which have high biodiversity and are under threat; they are not simply any area with high biodiversity.

In question 6 (b), most candidates provided full coverage of the wide range of threats facing biodiversity the Pacific SIDS and made effective and full use of the resources booklet. Some answers focused overly on natural disasters and many claimed a proven link between global warming and increased tropical cyclone activity. In reality, this link is still uncertain - an area of widespread debate. There were many responses which showed good synoptic linkages to climate change and examples of hazards. A significant number of candidates, surprisingly, did not address the issue of the relative importance of the threats.

Consequently many responses were a narrative of the threats, lacking any evaluation. A number of candidates recognised that some of the threats were global or regional, whereas others were more local. There were some convincing evaluations based on the concept that local threats were less significant because the SIDS could manage them if they chose to, whereas global threats were largely beyond the Pacific SIDS control.

A number of candidates seemed to misinterpret the key word 'relative'. Answers containing phrases such as 'all the threats have relative importance' were seen often; some candidates appeared to be reading 'relative' not as an adjective with a comparative meaning but rather essentially the same word as the adverb 'relatively' which they took to mean 'fairly' important.

Question 6 (c) asked candidates to examine 5 initiatives (Figure 7) and assess their contribution to a more sustainable future for the Pacific SIDS. Sustainability was directly addressed less than might have been expected. Some defined it, or made reference to the sustainability stool or quadrant but more often it was simply implied. Some tackled this question in a thematic way, perhaps grouping the 5 initiatives as either top-down or bottom-up approaches (itself a synoptic idea) and then weighed up their pros and cons. This type of response tended to be more

successful than those who listed all 5 initiatives and described their key features.

Synopticity was evident in this question with many comparisons made to schemes in St Lucia, the Galapagos and many others.

Many responses to question 6 (a) did not use the language of biodiversity and ecosystems, whereas the example shown here has a good grasp of technical terminology as well as a clear focus on the factors that influence levels of biodiversity.

A) The Pacific SIDs have such high biodiversity due to a combination of factors. High biodiversity is linked to high Ner Primary Productivity, that is the transfer of energy which can be measured by the amount of biomass produced. It is dependent on physical factors such as climate, water and light.

Biodiversity is defined as the totality of genes, species and ecosystem in an area. The Pacific SIDs are located close to the equator, leading to high temperatures and high NPP. High levels of biodiversity are achieved through high levels of endemism (species unique to the area) which is due to the isolation of the islands. As an example, one of the hotspots, the East Melanesian Islands has around 3000 plant species. Endemism is a common feature on many islands, such as Madagascar, whereby

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This demonstrates a good understanding of useful terminology (NPP) and the factors that influence the growth of biomass. They provide a definition of biodiversity, and go on to explain the importance of endemism.

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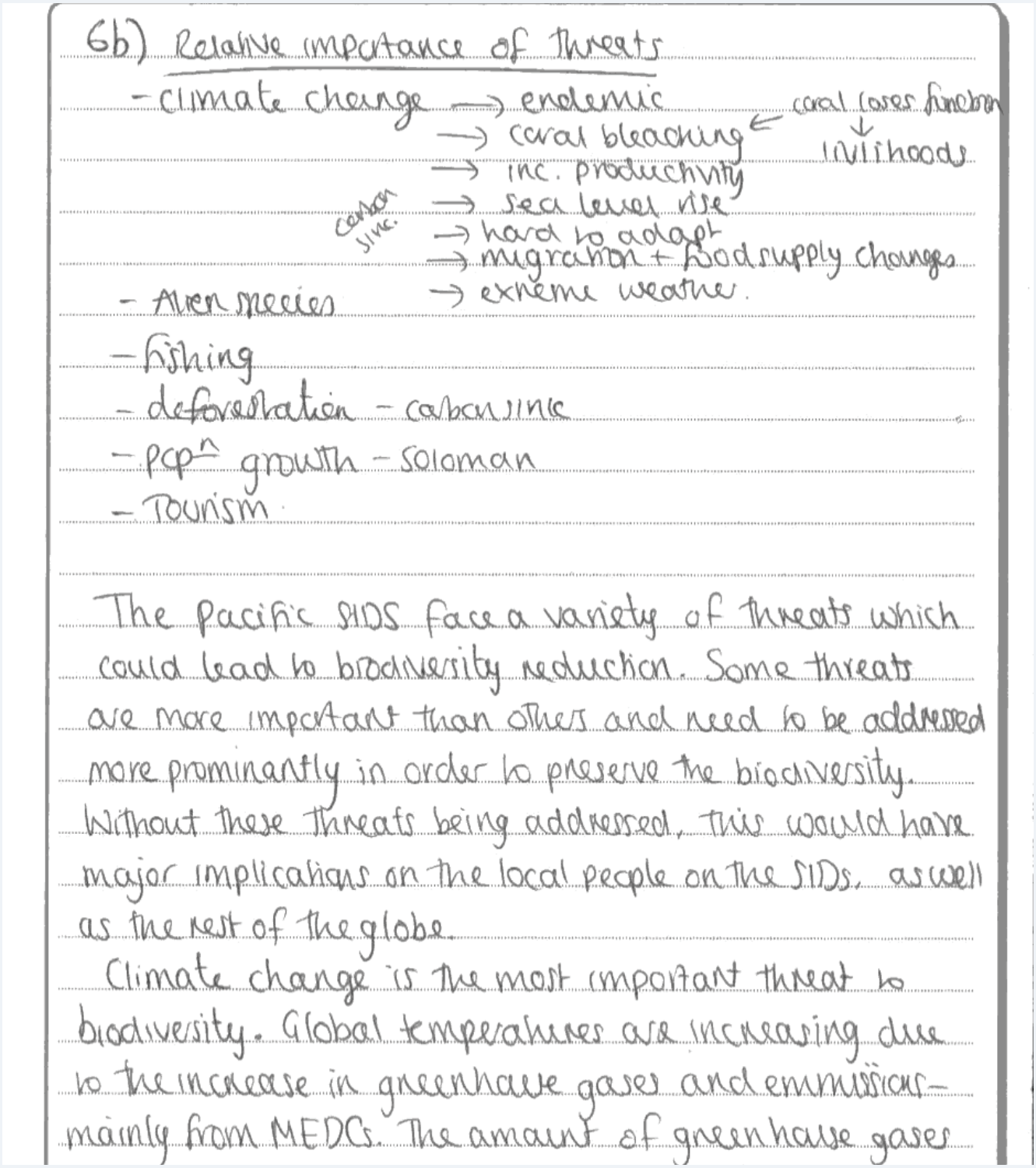
Examiner Tip

Try to focus on the question asked. Notice how this candidate's response immediately focuses on the factors that influence biodiversity and avoids a long-winded introduction.

The example shown of a response to question 6 (b) is part of a Level 4 answer. The candidate has completed a brief plan, which lists the threats to biodiversity which will be discussed. Planning like this gives candidates time to focus on the question and form their answer.



6b) Relative importance of threats

- climate change → endemic ← coral loses function → livlihoods
  → coral bleaching
  → inc. productivity
  → sea level rise (coastal inc.)
  → hard to adapt
  → migration + food supply changes
  → exreme weather.
- Alien species
- fishing
- deforestation - carbon sink
- pop^n growth - soloman
- Tourism

The Pacific SIDS face a variety of threats which could lead to biodiversity reduction. Some threats are more important than others and need to be addressed more prominantly in order to preserve the biodiversity. Without these threats being addressed, this would have major implications on the local people on the SIDs, as well as the rest of the globe.

Climate change is the most important threat to biodiversity. Global temperatures are increasing due to the increase in greenhouse gases and emmissions - mainly from MEDCs. The amount of greenhouse gases

are increasing due to the global population growth (ie. more car users ~~each more~~, industrialisation and the rise of NICs - such as the BRIC countries, who are all developing their economies at a ~~pr~~ cost to the environment.

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This answer begins with a recognition that "some threats are more important than others" and then quickly moves on to the "most important threat". Within the first few lines the candidate has demonstrated that they are answering the question. Some synoptic ideas (NICS, BRICs) appear in the second paragraph.

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Notice how this candidate has written, and underlined, "Relative importance of threats". This brief paraphrase is a neat way of focussing on the nub of the question - which threats are most important to the Pacific SIDS?

This example, of part of an answer to question 6 (c), shows how synoptic ideas can be integrated into a response. The candidate has recognised that actions can be either local or global in focus, and has also done some research on BAPS "in 2009, 1991 had been ratified". There is also further evidence of research in relation to Islands First and MPAs.

c) The CBD and BAPs are on a global scale which help to encourage conservation and sustainability. In 2009, 191 had ~~ratifie~~ been ratified but only a few had been completed. Although the few were located in the Pacific SIDS. It has global status but may not take any action without political will.

Islands First works on a global scale helping SIDS to have a voice at UN meetings and so raise their issues and opinions. This is extremely important as climate change is a global problem and in 2009 climate change was allowed to be discussed at UN Security Council as it was acknowledged as a ~~see~~ security threat. This means that the more powerful UN Security Council could discuss it.

Marine Protected Areas have worked in Vanuatu in Ngunu Pele as the ~~as~~ fish stock doubled from 2002 and average income quadrupled in last 5 years. However it requires funding and goverment stability to implement it correctly, otherwise no action may be taken. In some cases protected areas may not work as in Australia, the

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This response uses the language of evaluation. The candidate uses phrases such as 'may not', 'extremely important' and 'however, it requires...' This style of writing - weighing up the pros and cons - is crucial when responding to an 'assess' or 'evaluate' command word.

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Make sure you include synoptic examples and ideas, but these need only be brief. They also need to be relevant. Some synoptic examples leave examiners scratching their heads to see how the parallel example used relates to the question set.

Looking ahead, three key areas can be identified that centres may wish to focus on as they prepare candidates for the 2011 examinations.

1.Data stimulus skills are a key element of the 10 mark part '(a)' questions in Section A. Too often candidates fail to score the marks they should because of partial use of the information shown in a Figure and / or they move into very detailed case study descriptions which are not explanations of the geographical data they have been provided with.

2.Candidates should be very wary of writing anything along the lines of 'and another case study is….'. In the 15 mark '(b)' parts of Section A, a descriptive list of case studies is likely to score 8 out of 15 marks. These questions almost invariably demand higher skills of assessment and evaluation which endless case studies usually fail to address.

3.For those aiming for the higher grades, synopticity is crucial in Section B. Candidates need to enter the exam armed with some parallel examples and synoptic concepts, but equally they must be prepared to use these selectively and in the correct context.

Grade Boundaries

Grade	Max. Mark	a*	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
Raw mark boundary	90	69	63	57	51	45	40	35	0
Uniform mark scale boundary	120	108	96	84	72	60	48	36	0

a* is only used in conversion from raw to uniform marks. It is not a published unit grade.

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