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Principal Examiner Feedback

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In Geography (WGE02) Paper 01

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Introduction

This was the fourth sitting of WGE02, Geography Investigations, and whilst the entry remains small, the standard of responses was generally good and encouraging in some areas such as the fieldwork where some very good answers were encountered. In this area, there continues to be a marked improvement over time for many candidates. Most candidates managed to answer all questions on the examination paper and few 'blanks' were encountered. As might be expected there was variation in the quality of answers but there were many interesting and informed responses. There was a roughly even split between the physical and human options (Q4 and Q5). Centres may wish to consider some general points going forward:

- The paper totals to 60 marks and candidates were given 90 minutes to complete the paper.
- This exam paper consists of 5 questions, with the last two being paired options. In most cases each question has been tiered with longer, cognitively higher questions at the end of each section.
- Questions 1 and 2 test a mixture of AO1 and AO2 skills, whereas question 3 (compulsory), 4 (option 1) and 5 (Option 2) are based largely on fieldwork which is examined as an AO3 skill.
- Neither the Sample Assessment Materials nor the any of the live examination papers used the command word 'describe'. There are few marks for descriptions, and description should be used as a means to an end i.e. leading to an explanation, not an end in itself.

OVERALL IMPRESSION

The overall impression given by examiners was that the paper has discriminated well between candidates and has proved accessible. However, Examiners did identify some issues in candidate performance which centres should be mindful in future preparation of candidates for this exam. This included:

- Breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of the unit specification varied considerably, even with this small sample of candidates. There was variation especially in knowledge and understanding of key theoretical concepts, particularly with respect to some of the more technical physical geography.
- Although stimulus response material was provided many candidates are still not applying their knowledge accurately or relevantly. Many candidates still have problems in using evidence directly from the resource (an AO2 skill) in order to be able to generate a successful answer.
- Some candidates had a poor knowledge and understanding of the fieldwork questions, especially Q3d when there was a tendency to write "all I know" rather than giving a focus on the part of the enquiry pathway that was being examined. For this question, some failed to get into the L2 or L3 mark band as their answers were simply too generalised and non-specific.
- In addition, there was often a lack of fluency and structure in the longer answers, many candidates just describing and explaining, rather than a focus on assessment or evaluation when appropriate. The AOs remain very important for this assessment as in previous series.

QUESTION BY QUESTION FEEDBACK

Question 1 had a focus on the Crowded Coasts part of the specification (Topic 2.3). It was perhaps surprising the number of candidates who struggled to identify physical landscape features in Q1ai. As in previous series, these questions will always be about responding to the resources which have been provided. Rehearsing how to respond to photographs, data and maps is an important skill to encourage prior to taking the exam (e.g. by using these resources as starters at the beginning of lessons), allowing candidates to deal with features, patterns, trends and even anomalies. Q1aii was generally successfully dealt with by many, showing good understanding of weathering, although there were several candidates who wrote about erosion rather than weathering. Remember for the second mark the response needs to show clear developments and linking words such as “because” are often useful in helping to secure 2/2.

Q1b presented a challenge for many. It seemed for the majority there was a lack of clear understanding about sustainable policies. Some of the better answers included, for example:

- Clear separation showing understanding of different types of management, hard vs soft, timescales, effectiveness, costs and set against the sediment cell concept.
- Able to use located examples (knowing the specific types of management in a couple of places) and also able to contrast rates using evidence, e.g. costs per m etc.

Many also found it problematic to “examine” instead treating more of a case-study question, in which case their answers ended up too descriptive. For a few discordant and concordant coasts, were for many, a distraction over the management and policies.

Question 2, by comparison had a focus on the Urban Problems part of the specification (Topic 2.4). Again, this threw up similar difficulties for some candidates as in Q1. Most were able to understand the idea of maximum emissions (Seoul), but many struggled with the interpretation of the biggest range (greatest variation).

2aii in many respects was similar to 1aii. Many candidates clearly had the right intention but often didn't specify the particular way in which the planning solution had been implemented and then link that to the specifics of reducing air pollution. Again, practice is needed in developing descriptions into explanations. Many wrote about transport management, but there was plenty of scope for emission controls from heating houses or energy generation.

In Q2b some good answers which clearly understood some the range of impacts, identifying some of the influences using a clear geographical conceptual framework such as for example, social, economic or environmental impacts in the context of housing. The best answers had 1-2 well-chosen places (could be within the same city), with a good level of detail, e.g. supporting data / evidence. The best answers avoided generic statements like “polluted”, “high levels of litter” etc. Assessment was often interpreted as simply ‘another problems is...’ and only relatively few candidates really focused on deeper understanding through analysis or assessment, i.e. recognising that success may be difficult to determine, or the fact that impacts vary spatially etc. Evaluation can be delivered through a very short 1-2 sentence conclusion.

Question 3 was the compulsory fieldwork question, examining the fieldwork that the candidates have done themselves (“familiar” fieldwork). 3a was mixed, with some able to show good understanding of a title (or idea) and linking it to the purpose of the investigation. Whilst others were often not able to reason or consider any linkage to their investigation focus. It’s clear that not all candidates understanding either the sequence, nature of enquiry or the chain of reasoning that leads to the formulation of a title or question.

3b was mostly successful with some good development around specific sources, e.g. local planning documents, and then how that helps, for instance to plan the fieldwork locations.

3c was mixed with some very good answers at the top-end, showing specific ideas, e.g. references to sampling, methods, techniques, equipment and locations. Some candidates even wrote about frequency of sampling in relation to reliability. Other were less coherent, instead tending to describe the fieldwork experience as a rather unconnected list of ideas, lacking both detail and / or depth.

Q3d was the longest question on the paper. As in previous series there were big challenges for some candidates, who seemed to have no idea or concept of the command ‘evaluate’. Whilst at AS this exam does not expect a deep understanding of the scientific method and fieldwork principles a lack of awareness of the route to enquiry was often troubling, especially in the context of presentation and analysis. This was all too often evidenced by candidates describing the wrong part of the enquiry sequence. The focus for this Q was on Stage 5 (page 70) rather than the design and methods which are Stage 3-4 (page 69). For this question in particular, candidates are still finding it troublesome to evaluate, instead preferring to list and describe. Remember that the AOs are rewarding for this evaluation and analysis skill, rather than the skill of (fieldwork) recall which is characterised by description. In Q3 the fieldwork questions cannot simply be describe, and candidates.

As in other series, there was evidence that candidates were writing what appeared to be pre-rehearsed responses, which in many instances were not specifically answering the question set.

Questions 4 and 5. These are the final, parallel optional aspects of this paper, where candidates can either chose to answer coasts or urban-based question. As in previous series, these were some of the most successful parts of the paper for many candidates, providing good answers that were detailed and specific and that matched the questions set.

Q4ai and 5ai produced some excellent results from the majority, really understanding the nature and role of the stimulus material in helping to establish an enquiry pathway. Q4aai and 5aai were also mostly good quality, with the vast majority managing to link an idea of unreliability and provenance to comments regarding role of social media within an investigation.

Q4bi-iii and Q5bi-iii were however difficult for many. The mathematical skills outlined in Appendix 1, had for the most not been practised allowing enough confidence in the exam. Very few were able to determine correctly the type of sampling showing in 3c and 4c as being “stratified”. Instead, “systematic” seemed to be the default option since they were most likely familiar with that term.