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Introduction

This was the third WGE03 examination. The January entry is smaller than the June entry making generalisations about performance harder to make. However, a number of points are worth raising about performance on this examination paper which can be used to inform preparation for future examinations:

- Question 5 Water Conflicts was more popular than Question 4 Energy Security (the reverse of the June 2018 exam)
- Question 6 Superpower Geographies was more popular than Question 7 Bridging the Development Gap, although they are in reality quite similar.
- The difference in quality of answers between optional questions was very small. Some overall observations:
- Most Figures were interpreted successfully by candidates: as a general rule if there is numerical data on a Figure (such as Figure 1) candidates should try to use this as part of their answer to increase precision.
- Figures should be fully used, but not in a slavish way: for instance there was no need to refer to all 6 scores on Figure 2, however reference to only 1 or 2 scores would produce a narrow answer.
- Extended writing skills are generally good, however too few candidates grasp the importance of making a judgement or decision in the 15 mark and 20 mark essay questions that use high-level command words i.e. assess and especially evaluate.
- Performance on the synoptic question (Q3) was improved, with most candidates considering both strands of the question and many moving beyond simply agreeing with the contention, and suggesting alternative factors or explanations.

Question 1 Atmosphere and Weather Systems

This question was perhaps the most prone to description, for which there are essentially no marks (unless linked to explanation). Some answers spent perhaps $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of one side of paper stating what the trends shown of Figure 1 were. Stronger answers used the text-structure on the Figure (higher / lower / variable) to structure an answer that provided some explanation for each of the three dominant time periods.

One common weakness was to use weather events, such as the passage of fronts, to explain variations in rainfall. This is essentially using day-to-day phenomena (which the Sahel rarely experiences) to explain a change in climate averages. Stronger explanations focused on long-term changes such as greater prevalence of El Nino / La Nina events affecting weather patterns on a multi-year timescale. There was some, usually brief, discussion of the ITCZ and its seasonal movements and longer term changes e.g. becoming more irregular or failing to move as far north as expected – however understanding of the ITCZ was generally quite poor. Much better was the understanding that global warming *could* be responsible for the variability seen since around 1990. Overall, explanations of meteorological and climate processes was often quite weak. A number of answers focused either on causes only, or impacts only. Many of the impacts mentioned were generic and lacking depth e.g. a mention of drought or famine.

Question 2a Biodiversity under Threat

Answers to this question tended to be quite polarised between those that have a good understanding of ecosystem services and those to whom the concept was unfamiliar. The latter tended to be very weak answers that edged towards the idea of 'services' in the sense of economic sectors.

Most answers referred to global and local, and linked the three types of services to these different scales. A common type of answer explained the high local scores for provisioning services, and for cultural services (often arguing that these also had global value i.e. tourism) and the high global regulating services score – explained in the context of climate regulation. Climate regulation was very rarely explained in any detail. This is an important aspect of the value of ecosystems and might need to be revisited. Many answers were in the form of three explanatory paragraphs which was a very logical way to approach answering the question.

Question 2b Biodiversity under Threat

Answers to this question ranged from very good to rather weak. There were a number of issues worth mentioning:

- Some biomes that were named, such as the Great Barrier Reef, were neither terrestrial nor a biome. The GBR, like the Amazon, is a place not a biome.
- The scale a threats was sometimes incorrect: invasive species are a local threat (unless it is argued that the scale of the problem has become global due to very widespread examples of invasive species)
- Some answers did not mention global or local scale, just a range of threats.

The key to a successful answer was examining a range of threats (3 or 4 would be sufficient as long as both global and local were covered) and crucially making a judgement about which of the threats is the most severe ('worst' if you will). Without this judgement the '*evaluate the relative importance*' command cannot be fully addressed. Most answers that did address the question in this way argued that climate change or deforestation were most serious because of their widespread nature, the fact that they are continuing and crucially that both are very hard to manage. A few very good answers argued that issues such as invasive species were much less of a threat, because the threat could be reduced by careful management.

Some answers were just an 'everything I know about' a named place, such as the Amazon. Such answers fail to apply knowledge and understanding to the specific question asked.

Question 3 Synoptic

As in the past the synoptic question took two linked issues, being 'switched off' and weather hazard risk, and asked candidates to consider connection between them. These questions do require some joined up thinking. Overall, answers were slightly improved on past series with many candidates showing clarity over the meaning of 'switched off' and an ability to link this to weather hazard risk. A few answers quickly drifted into tectonic hazards. Many answers argued, successfully, that isolated, poorly connected places do have elevated risk. Often this was linked to poor communications and lack of warning, and difficulties in terms of aid and response. On the other hand, some argued that switched off places were often less 'switched off' than might be expected and that community knowledge of past hazard events was effective at reducing risk. Some answers argued that risk was more related to factors such as high population density, rather than isolation. Less often seen was the argument that very connected places can also be at high risk e.g. New Orleans during hurricane Katrina (although it could be argued the least switched-on areas of New Orleans were worst hit). There was less consideration of 'risk to what' than might have been expected e.g. life, versus economic loss.

Even very good answers, that did judge 'to what extent' tended to **lack the use of real world examples** which does weaken the evidence base used to support the argument. This is an area that needs some work.

Question 4 Energy Security

This optional question was done by a very small number of candidates. It is similar in terms of structure and command word to its partner, Question 5. Important aspects of the question include the fact there are two topics to cover: foreign energy sources and international energy pathways. Both were usually covered. In order to fully answer the question, other ways in which energy security might be improved also need to be mentioned. The most obvious of these is domestic energy production, perhaps especially the use of renewable domestic sources such as wind, solar or HEP.

Question 5 Water Conflicts

This was a popular option and was generally answered reasonably well. Use of examples was very common (see comments on Question 3, above) to support the answer. As with this type of question there is a danger candidates structure their answer along the lines of '*and my next case study is*' i.e. a descriptive answer rather than an evaluative one. This was seen, but was not common. A small number of answers were unclear about that meaning of 'water transfer' and seemed to envisage water being shipped from areas of surplus to places such as Africa. Most answers used examples of both dams and water transfers and considered their costs and benefits, before moving on to other ways that the demand for water might be met. This is really the key to a successful answer, as it allows the 'extent' to which dams and water transfers are useful to be compared to the other options.

Desalination, water conservation and small-scale, local projects such as tube-wells were all mentioned. A number of answers argued that large scale water engineering projects often created problems with hydro-politics and that this reduced their effectiveness due to conflict. The final stage of a good answer is to make a clear judgement – essentially which methods are 'best'. This of course varies by geographical circumstance. This final judgement is the area that needs some work, from some candidates: they provide a range of evidence in the main body of their answer but can't quite come to a clear judgement (or judgements) in the conclusion.

Question 6a Superpower Geographies

Candidates who chose this question demonstrated a good understanding of Figure 3 and were able to use the data to argue that TNCs provided superpowers with indirect cultural influence (soft power was a term used by some) and economic wealth which could be used for other purposes i.e. taxes used for military spending. The idea of TNCs using FDI to extend the economic influence of a country overseas was commonly seen. It is important, in these 5 mark questions to:

- Use data, or quote facts, from the Figure as part of the answer.
- Write extended points / explanations (not a series of short bullet points)

These questions are point-marked, not levels marked, on the basis of extended points for 2 marks each.

Question 6b Superpower Geographies

Most answers to this question were broadly successful. There was occasionally a lack of understanding of 'emerging superpowers' such that some answers were focussed on the USA only rather than countries such as China and India (and others). The word 'impacts' is essentially a neutral word, but many candidates tend to see it as a negative. Thus some answers tended to see the impacts of growing middle-class consumption as negative in terms of environment, pollution and resources – and not see the positive side in terms of higher quality of life, rising incomes and opportunities. That said, there were a number of more balanced answers that covered positives and negatives. 'Global' was not always considered directly, and rather like Question 3 many answers lacked the use of examples. A little more evidence would have turned some good answers into very good ones.

Question 7a Bridging the Development Gap

This option was less popular than Question 6. Answers usually had a good grasp that the differences on Figure 4 were rooted in the idea that the life-chances and opportunities of some groups were less good than others, and that this inequality was based on discrimination of some type. There was some understanding that this would lead to people working in different jobs, with different incomes.

It is important, in these 5 mark questions to:

- Use data, or quote facts, from the Figure as part of the answer.
- Write extended points / explanations (not a series of short bullet points)

These questions are point-marked, not levels marked, on the basis of extended points for 2 marks each.

Question 7b Bridging the Development Gap

Slightly less popular than Question 6b, this question produced answers that were a little weaker overall. The concept of the development gap was usually understood quite well, and the use of countries / places as examples of both sides of the gap were appropriate. Candidate's understanding of the benefits of trade in terms of reducing the gap was usually good, and examples were used to show this (most commonly China in terms of FDI inputs and exports). Sometimes fair-trade was used as an example of how a particular type of trade could help reduce poverty and therefore reduce the gap. Answers were often less convincing when attempting to argue that trade can be problematic; the idea that some developing countries might be trapped in a system of low-value exports was rarely seen. Most answers focused on trade, and did not broaden the answer out to consider other ways in which the gap might be narrowed (aid) or why it might be hard to reduce (conflict, landlocked countries).

Exam format reminder

It is important to understand that the examination question types and mark tariffs for WGE03 do not vary from one examination series to the next.

However, within Sections A, B and C the questions will vary from one series to another. This variation is random and does not conform to a pattern.

Some important points to note are:

- In Section A, Question 3 is a synoptic question and it will always be a 15 mark essay question.
- In Section A, there will always be a 10-mark data stimulus question on both A1 Atmosphere and A2 Biodiversity. The 15-mark essay question could be on either A1 or A2.
- In any exam series, Section B will either consist of a 5 mark stimulus question plus a 15 mark essay question, or a 20 mark essay question.
- Section C will be the opposite structure to Section B in any given examination series.

Please see the WGE03 Contested Planet Assessment Guide for further details:

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/International%20Advanced%20Level/Geography/2016/Teaching%20and%20learning%20materials/Contested-Planet-Unit-3-WGE03-Assessment-Guide.pdf>