Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In Geography (WGE04)
Paper 4: Researching Geography

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Introduction

Overall comments:

There were a few centres where candidates did not use a report format and so wrote a long essay. Centres need to be aware of the guidance on this paper. Other format issues included very brief introductions whilst others had overlong introductions which meant they ran out of time for a well-developed analysis.

Centres and their candidates need to see exemplar reports to understand how to structure a good report.

The most impressive reports used side headings for sections in the introduction and clear sections for the analysis, sub-conclusions, conclusion, evaluation. One centre had obviously instructed their candidates to write a **'research'** section which had some analysis and then an **'analysis'** section which had some research.

As with the last sitting too many candidates found it hard to deconstruct the titles and need practise in doing this. It would obviously useful to rehearse this after the pre-release steers are released so that candidates are aware that the actual question they need to address will not be **'Write all you know about…'**. The use of the command words and phrases such as **'Discuss..'** or **'To what extent'** is a clear enough indication that there will be a debate and that they'll need to weigh evidence rather than simply relay it.

There were a few examples where all candidates from a centre used the same few case studies and had carried out limited independent research. Centres need to be aware of the dangers of this approach as it can be self-limiting for more able candidates. It is also helpful if the case-studies help support the view that not only is there variety but also unpredictability.

The choice of case-studies is critical because the messy, counter-intuitive ones offer far more opportunities for evaluation than the clichés that simply reinforce general truths.

A significant number of candidates struggled to leave enough time for their conclusion and sometimes started to introduce new ideas at this stage of their report, which is unhelpful. More careful guidance on the requirements of each section of the generic mark scheme is needed to ensure candidates understand what a good report will look like.

Details of methodology have been patchy this year and only a few candidates successful referenced their sources in the report.

**Option 1
Tectonic Activity and Hazards**

The most effective approach to this question involved addressing the nature of impacts and how one measures their significance. The framework was generally to consider a range of tectonic hazards caused by earthquakes and volcanoes linked to the hazard profile to cover their magnitude, location, governance, prediction and the longer- and shorter-term impacts.

This was then followed by some contrasts drawn between examples of earthquake and volcanic events. The most impressive reports referred to a wide range of events in a range of countries at varying levels of development with detail evidencing extensive research. Much depended on the choice of case-studies as referenced in in the overview. With an appropriately open-minded research programme the complexity of this question could be addressed. In this way comparisons and contrasts in impacts were successfully drawn out throughout the answer and the analysis maintained a clear focus.

Unfortunately, many candidates chose to write about the impacts of two earthquake events and then the impacts of two volcanic events without any comparisons / contrasts being drawn about how serious the impacts of the events were. As a result, the analysis too often lacked focus on the question and the research evidenced too narrow a range of case studies. There was use of models eg Dreg, Park, hazard profile and others, but not always effectively linked to the question asked.

Popular case studies included:

Earthquake - Haiti, Nepal, Japan – Tohoku/Sendai, Boxing Day Tsunami, Kobe, Christchurch, Sichuan
Volcanoes - Mt St Helens, Montserrat, Iceland, Pinatubo, Nevado del Ruiz, Etna, Guatemala

**Option 2
Feeding the World's People**

There were a range of approaches used for this question. Some candidates chose to work through a range of case studies to consider the extent to which population growth linked to food security issues.   Others considered a range of factors influencing food security. This was sometimes more problematic as they did not always then link this to population grown and so lost focus on the question in their analysis.   Ideas of contrasting food insecurity within a country eg rural v urban contexts were often not considered and so complexity was not fully examined.

Models for Malthus and Boserup where popular although some candidates then struggled to use these effectively in their analysis and so had spent a lot of time explaining them in the introduction to then ignore them for the rest of the response. The pillars of food sustainability were also frequently referred to and some answers were able to use these effectively to structure their answer.

Popular case studies included: Sudan and South Sudan, Chad, Sahel in general, Ethiopia, India, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya

Factors including Climate change, pests and diseases, farming techniques, land grabbing, conflict, lack of infrastructure were discussed.

Option 3
Cultural Diversity; People and Landscapes

Candidates were able to define culture successfully but found it much harder to consider connectedness. The most impressive reports considered a whole range of types of connectedness eg transport links, education, migration, political, financial, trade…. and so, the impacts this had on cultural diversity in contrasting locations. The most popular framework was to use contrasting case studies, which brought out contrasts in cultural diversity but did not always link fully to connectedness.

Popular case studies included London v Cornwall, North Korea, Japan, Canada, Australia, New York, India.
This was not a very popular question so was limited to a few centres.

Conclusions again brought out the ideas of cultural diversity but the 'always' linked to most connected places was often less clear.

Option 4
Human Health and Disease

Candidates usually demonstrated a good understanding of the question and were able to link their answers to the Dalys and ETM models effectively. They were able to refer to contrasting case studies to consider the question and maintain a focus on the question in their analysis. The idea of development was also often considered with links to Rostow and other development theories used to support the structure of the answers.

Some candidates considered their case study examples as whole countries and so did not examine complexities where health risks can vary within a country, which was a very productive route of enquiry eg urban v rural contexts or contrasting economic levels eg in New York.

Frameworks were either by case study or by factor influencing health risks. Stronger reports generally considered factors eg level of pollution, lifestyle choices, diet, ability of a country to fight disease contagion (eg Ebola) and education programmes. This enabled candidates to use a wider range of case study evidence showing broader research and to maintain focus on the question.

All the candidates from one centre used the same three or four case studies which limited the range of evidence they could use for their analysis. They had very similarly structured answers with limited introduction and this suggested that candidates had not been encouraged to carry out their own independent research.

Candidates should always be given the opportunity to do their own research in preparation for this paper with guidance but not a prescribed list.

Popular case study locations included South Sudan, Sierra Leone, DRC, Ethiopia, Finland, Nigeria, USA and contrasting areas of New York, UK, Switzerland, Botswana, China.

Health risks covered included Ebola, Zika Virus, TB, Malaria HIV/Aids, Dementia, Obesity / Type 2 Diabetes, Cancers and Heart Disease,

Summary

The most impressive reports have;

- An introduction that references the title and the particular focus of the question asked rather than a generic list of points based on one or both pre-release strands
- A range of case-studies, some of which are complex and challenge easy clichés
- A proper report structure with good referencing and explicit methodology
- On-going evaluation throughout the analysis referencing back to the question
- A conclusion that references back to the title and comes to a view