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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2022

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In Geography (WGE02)
Unit 2: Geographical Investigations

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Introduction

This is the January 2022 series for assessment of WGE02: Geographical Investigations. There were 81 entries for this unit.

This was the eighth sitting of WGE02: Geographical Investigations and whilst the entry remains small, this year's entry still had a particularly challenging backdrop against the ongoing global pandemic. This will have no doubt affected patterns of learning as well as opportunities to collect first-hand primary fieldwork data. Those that did enter this series are once again, to be commended on their achievements and resilience.

As in previous years the fieldwork in **Question 3** this series was somewhat mixed – but this to be expected for this group of learners given the likely opportunity cost of not being able to do much fieldwork. Once again, there is confusion around the stages in the enquiry sequence (particularly presentation and analysis) which is essential for a successful outcome in this exam. Those that focussed too much on describing the data collection rather than what the questions required, answers were as always, self-penalising. There were also some very good fieldwork answers which were judgemental and reflective (**Q3d**) but for this series these were very much in the minority.

The success of this “familiar” part of the fieldwork (all of **Question 3**) really does depend on how suitable the fieldwork is that is set-up by the teachers and school itself. It is of course recognised that for this cohort in particular it would have especially challenging during the 2021-2022 period. However, Centres are reminded to keep the fieldwork aims both **manageable** and **achievable**. It's simply too ambitious and unanswerable, e.g., those students who find themselves investigating the impacts of London's Crossrail, or similar large-scale projects which are, as yet, incomplete. Similar examples exist from the locations where schools are based in different cities. Centres would be well advised to review the manageability and appropriateness of their fieldwork, particularly whether it is possible to reach a realistic conclusion given the location, scale, and data collection methods.

As in the previous series, most candidates managed to answer all questions on the examination paper and few 'blanks' were encountered.

This year **Question 4** was the preferred option compared to **Question 5** but that was merely a reflection of the choices of the small number of centres that entered. Those relatively new to teaching this part of the specification may want reminding that:

- 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 is slightly ramped in demand with longer, cognitively higher questions at the end of each sub-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 for this particular exam.

- Neither the Sample Assessment Materials nor the any of the live examination papers have ever used the command word 'describe'. Candidates should be reminded that there are few marks for just 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 provide some observations in terms of candidate performance which centres should be mindful in future preparation of candidates for this exam. These 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 "players", with many instead choosing to simply describe approaches to coastal management. Many also found it difficult to understand the command "examine", failing to write in a more evaluative style.
- Although stimulus response material was provided some 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) to be able to generate a successful answer. Questions which use the command "Identify" e.g., **Q2ai** need a little context for the piece of information that is being obtained from the resource. Simply writing "roads" or "infrastructure" without something explicit linking the idea to the resources were unlikely to be credited. Much better practice is to write something like "new road construction" or "new building infrastructure".
- Some candidates had a poor knowledge and understanding of the fieldwork questions, especially **Q3d** when there was a tendency to write generically around fieldwork and their data collection experiences, including some of the ways fieldwork was followed-up. Instead, they need to give explicit focus on the part of the enquiry pathway that is being examined – in this instance presentation and analysis. For this question, some failed to get into the L2 or L3 mark band as their answers were simply too basic and non-specific in terms of sampling design, equipment and / or place.
- 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 (Assessment Objectives) remain very important for this exam as in previous series.

Reports on Individual Questions

Question 1 had a focus on the Crowded Coasts part of the specification (Topic 2.3.2). As in previous series, these questions are about responding to the resources which have been provided, i.e., the photographs of the two different mass movements. Rehearsing how to respond to photographs, data and maps is an important skill to encourage prior to taking the exam, for example by using these resources as starters at the beginning of lessons. This will give confidence and competence allowing candidates to deal with features from a map, patterns, trends, anomalies as well as interpret photographic evidence. **Q1aii** was

challenging for many. There were lots of answers refereeing to slope or water, rather than linked directly to geology, i.e., rock type or structure for example.

Q1b also presented a challenge for some candidates with a lack of clear understanding about threats. The mark scheme identifies these as AO1. It also indicates that these ideas would be particularly important in respect of AO2, i.e., the interpretation, assessment, and judgment as well as recognition of the complexity of threats that might occur (physical and human) in different coastal areas.

Only a minority of candidates attempted an "examination", i.e., some sort of evaluative assessment. Instead, many saw it more as a "place" case-study question, in which case their answers ended up too descriptive. Hard and soft defences were explained were written about, unfortunately providing a distraction over the different severity of possible threats.

Question 2, by comparison had a focus on the Urban Problems part of the specification (Topic 2.4.4). Again, this threw up some similar difficulties for some candidates as in **Question 1**. The vast majority, however, were able to use the photograph resource to identify the range of evidence that this area has been regenerated.

2a ii was a little more successful than **1a ii**. Many candidates were able to correctly write an explanation about why regeneration might be needed, often using some sort of stimulus from the resource. On occasions, some candidates here provided far too much detail. These are not case-study questions, merely questions requiring a statement of explanation showing some development through the "why".

In **Q2b** the answers were mixed with some candidates confused by the sustainability aspect. Clearly the words "schemes" requires more than one example to be provided as evidence. As in previous years, the best answers had 2-3 well-chosen places with a good level of detail, e.g., supporting information in the form of numerical data.

The problem for most, however, which acted as a barrier to L3, was that they failed to assess the importance. Only a few students "took-on" the question by perhaps suggesting the planners, money or even the local community might also be as important and therefore sustainability takes more of a back-seat. Examiners were not expecting too much writing on a comparative judgement, but it would have usefully been included in the conclusion allowing access to L3. Even a short, single sentence, would have provided enough evidence for the "Assess" command word.

Question 3 was the compulsory fieldwork question, examining the fieldwork that the candidates have completed themselves (often termed "familiar" fieldwork).

As in previous series, **Q3a** is usually rooted towards the start of the enquiry sequence. For this series, risk assessment was tested and this included a wide range of risks including health and safety, but also the risk of inaccurate fieldwork data collection (because of constrained methodology for example).

3b was mostly well understood, with the majority recognising the role of both the internet and GIS in supporting the planning phase of a geographical investigation. Some were self-penalising in terms of not providing sufficient development of ideas, therefore getting only score 1 or 2 out of a possible maximum of 4. Since this is an explain question, simply stating a technique is not likely to yield more than 2 out of 4 marks.

3c demonstrated mixed successes since many were unclear as to the significance of different sites in the context of reliability and understanding either temporal or spatial change. Instead, writing about how they collected data without reference to the idea of different sites. Again, it's key that as part of the preparation for fieldwork, centres are encouraged to share the planning and decision-making process with students so that they understand both the "why" and the "how", even if this is taught as a simulation or using virtual fieldwork.

Q3d remains the longest question on this paper. As in previous series there were big challenges for some candidates, who still struggle with the command word 'evaluate'. Even at AS, this exam does expect a good understanding of both scientific method and fieldwork principles. Yet 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 question was on Stage 5 (page 69 in the specification). For this question in particular, candidates are still finding it troublesome to evaluate, preferring instead to list and describe fieldwork techniques and events that they can remember. 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 **Question 3** the fieldwork questions cannot simply be describe, and candidates should be reminded of this when they develop their style of writing.

However, given the challenges of Covid-19 over the past 24 months centres and students should be applauded in the way that they were able to provide meaningful fieldwork and virtual fieldwork experiences.

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.

As in previous series, **Q4a** and **Q5a** produced some excellent results from the majority, being able to make sense of the data, and the advantage of median compared to mean. Just stating "accurate", however, was not enough to get credit without any development of why, e.g., the role of outliers in influencing the mean.

Q4b and **Q5b** were also mostly good quality, with the vast majority managing to get at least 2 marks. Clearly their knowledge of social media was valuable!

Q4Ci-iii and **Q5ci-iii** were mostly successful, showing how these number skills must have been practised allowing confidence in the exam. Part (**d**) was however problematic for some as they were unable to expand their logic up to the 3 marks

available by developing a single reason. Remember the mathematical and fieldwork skills are outlined in Appendix 1 and 2 respectively.