



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **Geography 2030** *Specification*

## **GEO4B      Geographical Issue Evaluation**

# **Report on the Examination** *2010 examination - January series*

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## General

This first paper on the new Specification proved very accessible to candidates with the vast majority of candidates able to produce reasonable responses to at least some of the questions. Better candidates were able to maintain a very creditable performance throughout the paper. This meant that there was a good spread of marks with a reasonable proportion of candidates scoring more than 40/60 but with very few scoring less than 15/60.

The focus of the paper was on walking and cycling in an urban environment. This may have been an unexpected topic but there were clear links to different aspects of the Specification, particularly:

- urban structures and differences in socio-economic status between different areas of towns
- the planning and design of towns to encourage a healthy life style and reduce ill-health
- the planning of efficient and inter-connected and sustainable transport systems
- map reading skills
- data presentation and analysis skills
- fieldwork design and planning
- research skills.

The Advance Information Booklet (AIB) was available to centres well in advance of the examination and contained strong clues to possible question topics and direct advice on preparation for the written paper. There was strong evidence that the majority of candidates had been well prepared, knew the AIB well, and had engaged in research of their own.

No part proved to be particularly difficult, although Question 3 produced some poor responses due to a lack of real understanding of techniques (in a) or a lack of confidence in answering the question set (in part b). Question 2 sometimes produced poor answers which lacked detailed knowledge of the area(s) studied. This may have been due to a lack of adequate preparation or it may have been due to poor examination technique. However, the best answers to Question 2 were excellent. Question 1 was generally answered quite well and Question 4 was generally answered very well, with some quite superb answers.

Overall the questions seemed to be accessible to the vast majority of candidates. There was rarely any evidence of candidates running out of time in this examination; on the contrary, many wrote at great length and in great detail, often needing to extend their answers onto extra sheets of paper.

The most important advice to teachers as a result of the marking of this paper is that all candidates should be trained to prepare as fully as possible with the Advance Information Booklet. They need to:

- ensure that they are familiar with all the material in the booklet
- know the meaning of every word and phrase used in the AIB
- think about what issues are being considered in the AIB. There will usually be a core issue but the material will almost certainly extend to touch on a variety of different issues from different parts of the Specification
- consider how the material in the AIB links in with ideas and concepts that have been studied during the whole A Level Geography course
- also think how case studies from the course might be used to aid understanding of the area and themes in the AIB

- consider how data provided in the AIB might be manipulated, analysed, mapped, etc., and why particular techniques might be suitable for analysing and presenting those data
- follow up on any suggestions for further research using the internet....but do not go too far beyond the sites suggested because this risks wasting a lot of time
- work as a class to think about how the suggestions for fieldwork might be put into practice. However, it will not be expected that candidates must go out and do the fieldwork that they have been asked to think about.

Many of these points relate to the overarching concept of “thinking like a geographer” and relate to the synoptic aspect of assessment in Unit 4B (see specification section 4.5).

They will also, inevitably, think about the types of questions that will come up on the paper and this is usually a very useful exercise – as long as candidates remain flexible and do not think they can predict questions exactly. When that is done candidates often end up planning an answer to the question that **they have predicted** and then presenting this answer in the exam....even though the question **the examiner has set** is significantly different from the one they expected.

## Question 1

This question was generally well attempted but answers often needed more evidence to support ideas and more linking and development of ideas.

There was a lot of material in the AIB concerned with the geography of health and the structure and planning of towns. Most candidates used this sensibly, often linking together pieces of information from different parts of the Booklet to develop sensible and logical arguments. Candidates who did this often reached low Level 2 purely by using and developing material from the AIB. However, to go beyond this they had to bring in facts and ideas from elsewhere.

Some candidates reached high Level 2 marks by concentrating almost entirely on health aspects of the question and adding their own evidence to their arguments. Others moved on to consider how encouragement of walking and cycling could help:

- reduce carbon dioxide and other types of pollution with many positive effects, including reducing man-made climate change
- slow down resource depletion
- reduce congestion on the roads, reducing stress and costs
- encourage community development

etc.

Unfortunately there was so much information available in the AIB that some good candidates failed to reach Level 3 because they spent too long making simple points based on the AIB and did not show enough ambition to extend their answers to show a wider understanding of geography. The minority of candidates who did reach Level 3 wrote very interesting and creative answers. They are to be congratulated for this.

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## Question 2

The quality of the answers to part (a) of the question depended enormously on the quality of the work done in preparation and on candidates' ability to apply what they had learnt.

Many candidates had done a study of their own school or college. Many others had studied a primary school in their local area, probably considering that this would allow them to study a more precisely defined and limited area. Such studies usually led to good answers.

A smaller number relied on schemes from other parts of the country, publicised in the sources given in the AIB. Some of these candidates produced very good work, usually when they had studied an example for which there was a lot of information available. Others seemed to have adopted a minimalist approach to their preparation and studied an example where little detail was available and such candidates often produced very thin answers, unless they backed up their studies with knowledge of their home area.

Finally a fairly large minority of candidates relied on the Guildford area. Many of these were unable to give precise detail about particular schools and so failed to gain the higher marks because of the general nature of their answers. However, some students had obviously extended their study of Guildford schools by reading individual schools' websites and using Google Earth or other similar site to research local details. Where this had been done there were some very good answers that clearly gained full marks.

In general the best answers:

- gave a detailed criticism of the suitability of the networks
- considered both walking and cycling whilst weaker candidates often concentrated just on cycling
- contained both qualitative and quantitative support material
- were very aware of the effect that motorised traffic had on the adequacy of cycling and walking networks
- very occasionally illustrated the answer with one or two sketch maps.

Answers to part (b), understandably, depended upon what had been chosen in part (a). Where the network was judged to be inadequate in (a) there was ample opportunity to suggest improvements in (b). However there were candidates who had chosen a recently 'improved' network in (a) and still managed to suggest further realistic improvements.

However, whilst part (a) had been about 'networks', part (b) was more open so a large number of candidates wrote about the importance of education, bike sheds and showers, parental support and publicity in developing walking/cycling schemes. Less able candidates tended just to lift items from the list of suggestions in the AIB whereas the better candidates applied these ideas in a clear context in a specific location.

Some other very successful answers took ideas from the websites suggested for study and tried to show how these same ideas could be applied in other contexts.

At times the suggestions for developments were very expensive, although that did not necessarily make them wrong. However, this question produced some very imaginative and creative answers which made very interesting reading.

Existing school travel plans were appropriately used by candidates in both parts of Question 2.

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### Question 3

Part (a) was not well answered. Some candidates gave a list of all the possible ways of showing data whilst others talked about a tally chart which is a technique for data collection not presentation.

The best way of showing a sequence of discrete totals collected over a period of time is by using a bar graph. Candidates should have realised that this is why monthly rainfall totals are always shown on bar graphs whilst average monthly temperatures are shown on line graphs which suggest a gradual transition from the average in the middle of one month towards the average in the middle of the next month.

Scatter graphs might be used to show the data but they are generally used when there might be a correlation between the two sets of data being graphed, so they allow a trend in the data to be seen. They are not particularly useful for showing the peaks and troughs that might occur in data of this sort.

However, if candidates showed how line or scatter graphs could be used and mentioned that two lines could be drawn to show flows in two different directions they were awarded up to two marks.

Candidates who explained how paired bar graphs could be used to show the two directions of flow over the time period gained two marks. If they went on to show how composite bar graphs could be used to show how the total numbers were sub-divided between different modes of transport and/or different age/sex groups were able to gain full marks. Good, clear diagrams to show the type of graph were invaluable for some of the best candidates.

Part (b) produced better answers on average although, on the whole, results were still rather disappointing.

Some candidates assumed that they were really expected to justify the use of this questionnaire by sixth form students, so they went to great lengths to justify the technique. They showed little practical understanding.

Many others wrote answers that were completely condemning of the technique and saw no redeeming features in it. Nor did these answers show how parts of the questionnaire could be adopted and adapted for sixth form use to research travel patterns to school.

However, more thoughtful candidates considered what the question was about and thought about the type of information that would be needed for a project like this. They were then able to make comments that were critical but constructive. Their answers accepted some aspects of the questionnaire, adapted others and rejected some parts completely.

In fact many of the answers that gained full marks accepted some of the questions but rejected the idea of the intercept survey. Instead they decided to use a questionnaire based on the outline given but to conduct this with children during school time, or even to ask form teachers to allow the questionnaire to be completed in form period.

So the best answers to this question could all be characterised as showing constructive criticism to a problem in applied geography.

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## Question 4

AQA apologises for the error that occurred in the map in Question 4, when two of the shading types on the key were transposed. Very careful attention was paid to answers to this question. If ever it seemed that candidates had been puzzled by the mis-match they were given the benefit of any doubt.

In part (a) a very small number of candidates showed constructive criticism pointing out that the map did not match the table of statistics provided in the AIB and going on to provide answers that covered both sets of data. However, the overwhelming majority of candidates did what they are always told to do in exams – **they answered the question as set**. The fact that this was easily the highest scoring question on the paper shows that most candidates were not unduly troubled by the error. In fact it gave some of them something unexpected to write about and they coped with it well.

The mark scheme allowed up to three marks for identifying three different types of population density, giving names or numbers of districts and linking these with a density and a location. The three types of population density were:

- densest in the two wards just to the northwest of the centre
- quite dense in the rest of the central area
- much less dense as the edges of the Borough were approached.

Level 2 marks were awarded when candidates described an overall pattern and then saw that the wards on the northwest edge, around Ash, were an anomaly to the general pattern.

It should be noted that quite a lot of candidates suggested explanations for the patterns observed. These were not asked for and no extra credit was given for them. Fortunately there was no evidence that this wasted time and meant that part (b) could not be attempted properly.

Part (b) was generally answered well, with most candidates getting at least into Level 2 and scoring half marks or more. A higher proportion of candidates reached Level 3 on this question than on the other two three-level questions and there were some really superb answers, which showed very good geographical understanding, good synthesis of ideas and a very real sense of place.

The main themes that gained credit were:

- the general shortage of well designed routes for active travel in Guildford
- a particular shortage in the most densely populated wards
- better provision of routes in the less densely populated (and probably better off) parts of the Borough
- a lack of connectivity in the network that does exist
- the availability of many areas for active leisure in parks, etc. within the Borough
- even more availability of space for active leisure around the edges of the Borough, with many of these areas being very attractive countryside
- a lack of cycle and foot paths to link these areas with the areas of dense population.

In order to gain the higher level marks these ideas had to be supported by:

- real examples, using names of places, grid references (and 6 figure references were usually needed, rather than 4 figures), road numbers or street names
- detailed map reading providing details of land use, housing types and densities, heights and gradients of routes and areas for leisure
- other evidence from the candidates' own research or background knowledge including, where relevant, comparisons with other areas studied.

Unfortunately some answers drifted back into school/college walking and cycling provision, or concentrated on journeys to work and failed to pick up on the general idea of active leisure pursuits. Of course many cyclists consider their journey to work to be inextricably linked with their leisure pursuit and so some credit could be given for such answers, but these candidates limited their opportunities for marks by not really answering the question as set.

A small number of candidates did state that they could not comment on the area around Guildford because it was not shown on the map extract. Meanwhile other candidates had obviously gone to the trouble of looking at Guildford's location within the country during their research period and could make very sensible references to the surrounding area. Even without such research candidates could have put the city in the context of the Green Belt and the Surrey Hills from little comments in the AIB and references on the edge of the map extract.