



General Certificate of Education

Geography 2030

GEO4B Geographical Issue Evaluation

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General

This was the second examination of GEO4B set on this specification. The issue was deliberately chosen to be very different from that in the first paper and it shows some of the range of topics and areas that will be chosen for the setting of this paper. The examinations will test knowledge and understanding of human and physical geography and of many of their different aspects; they will consider the synoptic links between the different topics; they will test application of fieldwork skills and the candidates' research abilities; and they will expect all the candidates' understanding to be applied to real places.

The first two papers have shown something of the possible geographical spread of the case studies that might be chosen, from southern England to northwest Scotland, but teachers and their candidates should be aware that the case studies can be drawn from any part of the world as well as from any part of the UK.

This paper also showed that there will be a range of questions which have a variety of approaches to the subject. There was a lot for candidates to do in a short length of time. The changes of approach meant that candidates had to be very flexible in their responses. Most managed to show this flexibility under difficult, pressurised conditions and this did them great credit. There were few signs of candidates having problems with the timing of the paper although, as always, there were some who spent too long on early questions and were forced to hurry at the end.

What could have been done better – general lessons from the exam

The examination produced a very wide range of responses from candidates. The best work was superb and there was much work that was good or very good. However, there was a significant minority of work that was very disappointing and it seemed as though some candidates had done very little, if any, preparation with the Advance Information Booklet (AIB). These candidates seemed totally unready for the type of questions that they were asked – even for those questions for which very clear guidance had been provided in the AIB. The less able candidates also often showed very poor examination technique, making a series of avoidable mistakes. There were a number of general problems that need attention from the less able candidates. These were:

1. Amongst these candidates at the bottom end of the mark range there was very little evidence of preparation for the fieldwork question and there was little evidence of research on the Geopark website. In future examinations candidates must be aware that questions can test these two aspects of the specification very directly and that they must prepare carefully and thoroughly.
2. Another factor which divided candidates into two quite separate groups was their ability, or lack of it, to interpret questions properly. This was particularly apparent in their responses to the different parts of Question 1 but also in their responses to Question 3.

Question 1 had three parts. They were all introduced by the statement "Study the census data...in **Item 5**...". Because it came in the preamble to the whole question it applied to all parts of the question. Then part (a) had a further preamble "Comment on the differences between Scotland and the Highland Region in terms of:". This applied to both parts (a)(i) and (a)(ii). In fact neither part made sense without that preamble.

The best candidates found this a straightforward question and many were able to gain 3 good marks but less able and more careless candidates made a number of mistakes including:

- Commenting on similarities and not differences in both parts of (a)
- Failing to comment on 'age structure' in (a)(i) and writing about total population instead
- Ignoring the census data in one or more parts, particularly in part (b). This would have been understandable, as it appeared on a separate page from the preamble – but the question referred to “the census...Data Zone” which should have reinforced the reference to the data
- Picking out interesting pieces of data from the tables but then failing to “comment on” it, or to add something from their own thoughts that showed an understanding of how the data could be linked to the geography of the area.

In Question 3 there were two references to “the physical geography of the area” and one reference to “the Ordnance Survey map extract” and yet many less able candidates made few, if any, clear references to the physical geography of this area and their references to the area shown in the map were very superficial and showed little sense of this as a real place with its own distinctive features.

3. Candidates should realise that this paper should be seen as a single exercise, developing ideas through from Question 1 to Question 4. In particular there were clear links between Question 1(b), which asked the candidates to look at Lochinver and analyse the nature of the area's problems, and Question 4 which asked them to assess one possible solution to some of those problems. Unfortunately it was comparatively rare to see scripts where candidates clearly returned in their final answer to refer directly issues that they had considered in Question 1. Those few candidates who did make these links clearly generally gained excellent marks.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

Up to 3 marks could be gained in **part (a)(i)** for picking out differences between the two population structures and illustrating these clearly with figures. Most candidates did this quite well. 3 was probably the modal mark.

To gain a Level 2 mark candidates had to make some comment that showed that they had clearly understood either the reasons for or the consequences of one of the differences. Alternatively they could do some manipulation of the numbers, such as working out percentage differences or adding together different age cohorts to show a more general pattern than shown by a simple comparison of one age cohort provided in the table of figures.

To gain maximum marks the answer had to make relevant comments on two different age groups.

In **part (a)(ii)**, many of the employment categories showed close similarities between the country and the region. No credit was given for comments on this as the question asked about differences.

Simple selection of relevant statistics could gain up to 3 marks but there had to be a reference to differences. Insightful comments moved the mark into Level 2.

Many candidates made references to primary employment but comparatively few took the logical next step and added together the percentages involved in farming, fishing and forestry and then compared the totals.

There was some confusion when candidates tried to compare service employment. A significant minority stated that there was obviously more service employment in Scotland than in the Highlands....and then struggled when they tried to add up the totals and found that this was not so.

This was clearly a case where good preparation with the AIB paid dividends in the examination with candidates finding it easy to write fluently because they understood the data before they went into the exam.

In part (b), candidates adopted three contrasting approaches to answering this question. Some stuck strictly to the data provided in Item 5 and merely quoted data from the table that supported each possible view. Clear and thorough completion of this task allowed them to reach the middle of Level 2, 9 or 10 marks.

Some avoided the data altogether and just referred to qualitative judgements of the health of the community, particularly referring to social cohesion and environmental sustainability. Again, this approach allowed candidates to reach the middle of Level 2.

The third approach combined the first two, using statistics supported by qualitative judgements to write well integrated and well considered essays. The two types of evidence were used to support each other and to write synoptically and to reach balanced judgements. Answers like this often reached Level 3.

Question 2

The Principal Examiner tried hard to find a map which showed an area that could realistically have been used for river-based, glaciations-based or coast-based fieldwork. This was not really appreciated by the majority of the candidature as at least 95% of them wrote about river-based work. However, when the candidates from a centre had prepared answers on coasts or glaciations these were often very good. Then so were the well-prepared answers on river-based fieldwork; unfortunately there were quite a lot of answers that had not been well prepared and which seemed to rely on fading memories of the candidate's own river study carried out in a very different area quite a long time ago.

Whichever topic was chosen examiners were looking to see whether candidates knew how to plan a fieldwork-based study. Such a study should involve:

1. Setting aims and objectives
2. Selecting sites for data collection – bearing in mind health and safety considerations
3. Carrying out data collection, showing attention to detail and to accuracy
4. Presenting data
5. Analysing data
6. Drawing conclusions.

Candidates could gain Level 3 marks in three ways:

- By describing most of the main stages briefly but clearly to give a practical outline of how the work could be carried out in this area, with all stages integrated into a good study
- By giving a clear objective and then giving detailed instructions for carrying out either stage 3 or stages 2 and 3, again with some reference to this area

- By providing detailed local information, gained from a detailed study of the map extract and probably from other sources as well, and adapting a standard piece of river coursework to fit these specific conditions.

Excellent examples of all three approaches were seen. They had clearly been thought about carefully in advance of the examination. However, there were also some common shortcomings that could have been prevented, given that candidates had been strongly advised to prepare for a question along these lines. These included:

- Failing to state the aims or the objective of the study
- Writing about selection of sites using phrases like “stratified sample” and “random sample” without any clear understanding of what these meant
- Choosing sites without any reference to the nature of the area as shown on the map
- Even going so far as to write about exactly the same piece of fieldwork that had been carried out in the candidate’s own area without making any attempt to adapt it to the nature of this area
- Over-emphasising the health and safety considerations to such an extent that there was little time or space left for any geography
- Giving too much detail about the theories that were to be tested, so that there was little time or space left for writing about actual fieldwork
- Choosing fieldwork that was so straight forward that it could easily have been done by a moderate GCSE group so that it provided no stretch or challenge for able A Level students
- Writing in too much detail about the nature of the equipment to be used and not explaining how it should be used on site
- Describing about 7 different data collection techniques with only a very brief comment on each, so that there was no depth or detail in the answer
- In stages 4 and 5 writing very superficial comments like “we would show the data on a variety of graphs” or “we would analyse the data using statistical techniques”. This approach again did not allow any of the depth needed for higher level marks
- Even when candidates were more specific in stages 4 and 5 and mentioned, for instance, scatter graphs or Spearman correlations they often did not state which **two** sets of variables were to be compared or correlated.

Overall the criticisms of the weaker answers could be summed up as showing a lack of originality and a lack of depth. Standard answers were ground out by weak and moderate candidates without very much thought about the nature of the area.

Question 3

There were some very good answers to this question but, in general, it was not well done. The main problem was a lack of precision in the work on physical geography. Candidates did not seem able to apply what they had read in the AIB, or learnt from their research, to what they could see on the map and make a coherent picture of the area. They could have written about some of the following aspects of physical geography:

- The broken, undulating nature of the terrain over much of the map area – a result of glaciations of an area of old, hard rocks to produce a landscape known as knock and lochan topography
- Some areas of extremely steep slopes leading to very high land
- The glacial valleys that cut across some parts of the landscape
- The thin soils in some areas produced by the glacial scouring followed by the slow weathering of the hard old rocks
- The peat found in other areas as a result of impeded drainage

- The steep rocky coastline with few areas of shelter
- The cold climate found in this part of northern Britain, despite the ameliorating effect of the North Atlantic Drift
- The heavy rainfall from the prevailing winds meeting the uplands
- The few small patches of cultivable land, produced by the post-glacial changes in sea level
- The physical features such as lochs, mountains, waterfalls, dramatic coastal scenery, physical isolation, etc. which are so attractive to walkers
- The geology of features like the Moine Thrust, the metamorphic rocks and the effects of glaciation and coastal processes which attract geologists

and so on.

Unfortunately few candidates mentioned more than one or two of these aspects of the physical geography and a substantial minority of answers lacked all references to physical geography. Even those candidates who did write in general terms about one or more aspects of the physical geography rarely made precise references to those features on the map.

Although the detail about the physical geography was limited many candidates did manage to write about the issues presented by the difficult landscape. They obviously wrote about the difficulty of building settlements, problems of communications and the limited opportunities of making a living from the land, but despite some quite creative thinking many answers were severely hampered by the lack of physical detail.

Here was a real opportunity for synopticity and for applying an understanding of geography in an unfamiliar context and the best candidates were able to do this well.

Question 4

On the whole this was answered quite well. In particular it seemed that most candidates were well trained in how to structure a discussion and to present a variety of different views on a topic. These views were usually well supported with good references to the AIB. However, this was sometimes taken too far and the use of quotations and references became an issue that held some candidates back to moderate Level 2 marks when the examiners felt they could quite easily have developed their answers to reach towards the top of Level 2 or even into Level 3. These answers almost became a string of quotes from the AIB, placed into an order which was logical but without enough of the candidate's own ideas and opinions to bear on the answer.

It was felt that this question offered a good opportunity for creative thinking, for synopticity and for exhibiting a sense of place. This opportunity was not often embraced wholeheartedly. Answers often seemed rather cautious and unimaginative.

For instance, many candidates quoted from P5 about the Geopark encouraging green energy initiatives; comparatively few went on to suggest that this area, exposed to the westerly winds off the Atlantic, might be ideally placed for the development of mini-wind turbines to generate energy for the local community, or that the heavy rainfall and steep slopes might make mini-hydro power schemes viable.

Most candidates' answers lacked any sense of spatial differentiation. They referred to the development of the area in general terms and rarely suggested that some parts of the area were more suited to family, beach-based holidays whilst others were suited to development as focuses of car-touring holidays and others could be developed for walking and mountaineering.

Finally, many answers referred to the creation of jobs in the tourist industry but few suggested what those jobs could be and having suggested that there were problems of keeping young people in the area, very few candidates suggested that there could be opportunities to develop skills in teaching outdoor pursuits, climbing, kayaking, sailing, diving, etc.

In fact there was a very strong tendency for candidates to see tourism to this area purely in terms of old people going for peace and quiet. It was rare for a candidate to see it as an area of challenge and excitement. Geographers often used to quote the phrase "We learned geography through the soles of our boots". Sadly it seemed that a large part of the candidature for this paper can only be expected to learn their practical geography through the soles of flip-flops on a Mediterranean beach.