



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2011**

Geography

GEO4B

(Specification 2030)

Unit 4B: Geographical Issue Evaluation

Report on the Examination

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General

This was the third time that this unit had been examined, and it was obvious that the standard of work produced by candidates showed a considerably improved understanding of the style of examination when compared with the two previous papers. There was much evidence of improved marks with more of the better candidates achieving very good results, and notably fewer performing badly.

In general, it was apparent to examiners that candidates had prepared well with the Advance Information Booklet (AIB) so most had a good understanding of Laganside, Duncairn and Inner North Belfast. Many had developed a good understanding of the area and its geographical development. Often candidates related this understanding to the wider field of geography, making synoptic links between this area and their general geographical understanding, and their knowledge of other comparable areas.

Candidates performed well on the 'core' questions on the paper, i.e. 1 (a)(ii) to 3, but there were some quite noticeable problems for some candidates and some centres with the first and the last questions, i.e. 1 (a)(i) and 4.

Question 1 (a)(i)

In general, candidates did not seem well prepared for this question and they did not respond well to the double command. They had to name and outline a technique to display the data given and then go on to justify their choice of technique. Most candidates did one or the other but a large number did not do both and even fewer did both well.

1 mark was available for naming an appropriate technique. Many candidates chose to use a bar graph and many others chose a pie graph. Most of the rest chose a divided bar. Any one of these answers was sufficient for a mark so an overwhelming majority of candidates safely secured the first mark.

The 'outline' instruction was looking for candidates to describe how they would carry out the technique. Those who chose bar graphs were expected to mention:

- labelling the x axis with three columns
- choosing a scale and labelling the y axis
- drawing (and possibly shading) the three columns.

Those who chose pie charts were expected to mention:

- drawing a circle
- working out the angles for the three segments
- marking (and possibly shading) and labelling the segments.

For any technique, a clear sketch diagram could have helped the answer considerably.

For any technique a clear outline of how to draw the graph on a computer could also have been written. However, some detail would have been needed to score good marks, such as naming the program to be used and explaining how the different fields should be set up, and how the data should be entered. Very few candidates did this. Most who referred to computers just made a very brief comment such as 'I would use a computer to draw the graph.' This, on its own, did not gain credit.

Naming the technique and clearly outlining how it should be done allowed candidates to reach the top of Level 1 and score 4 marks. Naming and clearly justifying a technique could equally well have allowed candidates to reach the top Level 1 mark.

Justification of the bar graph could have included some of the following points (although candidates could achieve full marks by considering only two or three):

- they are easy to draw and do not need specialised equipment or any working out
- the relative heights of the columns allow the reader to gain a quick, accurate impression of the relative importance of the three data sets
- the three sets of data are discrete and not sequential and so a bar graph is more suitable than a line graph
- the original data can easily be read off the graph
- if users planned to show comparable statistics for other areas the technique could easily produce further graphs for comparison
- graphs like this one could be located on a map, if figures for different wards were to be compared.

Justification of the pie chart could have included some of the following points (although candidates could achieve full marks by considering only two or three):

- the figures are in percentages, adding up to 100, and so they will fit a pie chart
- as they are in percentages there is little working out to do to calculate the angles
- if there are too many segments in a pie chart it is difficult to read, but there are only three sets of data here so that is ideal
- the three sets of data are discrete and not sequential and so a pie chart is more suitable than a line graph
- if users planned to show comparable statistics for other areas the technique could easily produce further graphs for comparison
- graphs like this one could be located on a map, if figures for different wards were to be compared.

To reach Level 2, candidates had to do both parts of the question. The two parts both had to be done well to achieve the full marks.

Teachers and their candidates should be aware that questions similar to this one could be set on future GEO4B papers. They could relate to data that has been presented in the AIB. It is suggested that one aspect of their preparation with the AIB should be a consideration of how data in the booklet could be presented or analysed. Any of the techniques listed in the specification (section 3.6) could be examined if they are suitable for data in the AIB.

Question 1 (a)(ii)

Most candidates answered this question well. Very few failed to reach the top of Level 1 and most achieved middle to high Level 2 marks. In general, the better answers did one or more of the following:

- quoted evidence from the census data on both Inner North Belfast and Duncairn
- compared that data with data from the rest of Belfast and the rest of N Ireland
- manipulated data, working out percentages or differences
- made references to spatial differences, particularly between the different parts of Duncairn
- linked the census data to places on the OS map, using grid references to clarify their points
- pointed out clear links between different sets of data, such as seeing the connection between unemployment, low economic status, poor education, health, etc.

The most disappointing aspect of the answers to this question was the way some candidates wrote interesting answers which drifted away from the evidence of deprivation and a discussion of that evidence, on to reasons why the area was deprived and how that deprivation was being tackled. In other words, these candidates started to answer Questions 1 (b) and 2, rather than sticking to the task set.

Question 1 (b)

This question was also generally well done. Most candidates dealt with the two key themes of the decline in the shipbuilding industry and the ‘troubles’.

The best answers on the shipbuilding industry looked behind the fact of its decline to mention causes of that decline – particularly referring to globalisation and cheaper labour and better technology elsewhere. They also referred to the Ordnance Survey map extract and gave locations of derelict land along the Lagan.

The best answers on the troubles gave just a brief background to the causes of the conflicts but concentrated mainly on the way that bombing, burning, the construction of Peace Lines and the separation of communities, had led on to abandoned housing and businesses, flight of the better-off, and the less partisan, and other related aspects of urban decline.

In addition to these two main themes, some candidates wrote very well about general causes of urban decline in inner cities in the UK – such as suburbanisation and the development of the rural-urban fringe – and related this to Duncairn. Some made useful comparisons with their own case studies in other cities but kept these comparisons brief and pertinent.

Question 2

In general, it can be said that the answers to this question, were the best that have been seen to any question on any of the three GEO4B papers that have been set so far. Candidates had prepared well, knew the three schemes, differentiated between them well, and planned their answers logically.

Two features that made the best answers stand out were:

1. an ability to present ideas, particularly referring to the aims and achievements of the different organisations, and to support these ideas with clear summaries of the relevant facts about particular schemes, such as Lagan Weir, Duncairn Gardens and the Intermediary Labour schemes in Inner North Belfast
2. a recognition that the three schemes were complementary, usually recognising that Laganside brought many jobs to the area but that the other two schemes provided the training and the means of access to work that was essential to allow people from Duncairn to take up those jobs.

Question 3

Some candidates produced very good answers to this question by writing briefly but succinctly about all the stages of a piece of fieldwork from setting a hypothesis through data collection and presentation to analysis. Others produced equally good and high-scoring answers by concentrating on data collection, and on sampling techniques. In either case, the best candidates stood out from the moderate ones because they were specific rather than writing in generalisations. For instance:

- if they gave a hypothesis it was linked to the task and it made reference to quality of environment **and** redevelopment, usually suggesting that quality would fall with distance away from the redeveloped area
- if they referred to sampling they did not just make casual reference to ‘random’ or ‘stratified’ or ‘structured’ sampling but they explained what they meant and how they would apply that type of sampling in their chosen area
- if they referred to pre-testing a questionnaire they knew how they would do it and what they would hope to achieve thereby
- if they referred to a bi-polar environmental assessment they were clear about what aspects of the environment they would survey, what the bi-polar aspect of it meant and how they would set criteria for judging some aspects, at least, of the environment
- if they referred to displaying results on a scatter graph or analysing them with a Spearman rank correlation they were clear about which two variables they were comparing and so on.....

Unfortunately, the less able candidates tended to toss lots of sensible words and phrases into an outline answer but did not go into any detail or show any depth of understanding on any aspect.

Question 4

This style of question, asking for a critical analysis of a web site, has not previously been set on GEO4B, although it could be set on future papers. A small proportion of candidates did not attempt this question. In some cases this might have been because they ran out of time; it is not possible to say how many candidates missed it because they simply could not think how it should be attempted. Possibly some of the non-answers were as a result of candidates not having visited the sites during their preparation.

Of the candidates who did attempt the question, a large majority scored between 2 and 4 marks, with 3 probably being the modal mark. Many of these candidates wrote in detail about the content of the chosen sites but made only limited comment on the usefulness of the sites.

The one aspect of the sites that was widely commented on was the perceived bias, or lack of it. In particular, candidates wrote about bias on the Laganside site. In fact this sometimes seemed to be dealt with excessively. Candidates did not seem able to appreciate that the site was designed and written from a distinct point of view and that it was unreasonable to expect it to then present the opposite point of view as well. It almost seemed as though candidates had looked at bias in historical sources and applied the same criteria to present-day documents when it is not really appropriate. Brief comments on 'point of view' would have been more appropriate than detailed discussion of 'bias'.

Then candidates could have gone on to consider aspects of the site(s) such as:

- ease of navigation around the site
- the quality of photographs, and their relevance to the candidates' studies
- whether the site had useful links (such as the Best of Belfast's links to Google Maps)
- the usefulness of any maps on the site (and there were some very apposite criticisms of the Flashmaps on the Laganside site)
- the appropriateness of the language and the level of detail for someone wanting to learn about redevelopment in Belfast
- whether the site left any gaps that could be filled by use of other sites (and references to the sites of the North Belfast Partnership and the Department for Social Development were particularly relevant here and showed good research skills)
- the aesthetics of the site
- genuine references to bias that might be hidden but was still relevant (such as the occasional reference to the Best of Belfast's noticeable emphasis on the British royal family's involvement in opening many of Belfast's buildings – suggesting something about its author's background which might have made it less acceptable to the other part of the community!)
- whether information on one site was supported by or contradicted by references elsewhere, which is one way of checking the reliability of a site.

Of course no one went into detail on more than one or two of these points but they are listed here to show the way that geographers could develop a specific set of geographical criteria for evaluating web sites....and possibly other sources too.

Conclusion

It would be sad to end this report without emphasising how well candidates and teachers have come to terms with preparing for, and taking the Issue Evaluation Paper. This made marking the January paper a very positive experience, and thanks are due for the hard work and thought that has gone into preparing for and sitting it.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.