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General Certificate of Education (A-level)
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Geography   **GEOG1**

(Specification 2030)

Unit 1: Physical and Human Geography

Report on the Examination

General

The best answers sought to respond to the command word or words. Responses were thoughtful and discursive; stimulus material was effectively used; specific geographical terminology was appropriately applied and there was case study place specific support. Clearly some had applied the comments stated in the January 2012 report, "As ever, there is a need to restate the perennial comment regarding the command words and deconstructing the question. It is imperative that command words are not just known, but that their meaning is understood so that candidates know how to respond. Thus, they should be aware that 'comment on' is not the same as 'describe' and 'assess' requires a judgement to be made based on evidence supplied. Equally, they must be taught and practice deconstructing questions so that they can meet the requirements of the specific question on the paper". And similarly some had applied the comment from June 2011, "Many questions have a discursive element and candidates should be encouraged to engage with this. Common command words that invite discussion are 'to what extent', 'comment on' as well as the more overt 'discuss'".

However, the overall quality reveals the need for significantly more work to be done in this context so that more of the candidates can engage with the questions set. This demands that candidates are taught how to deconstruct a question. They need effectively to translate – putting it into their own words – by identifying the command word and being aware of its meaning; by identifying key concept(s) and displaying understanding of this/these; there must be a recognition of any limiting factors – such as the need to refer to a figure or a case study/ies and these restrictions must be accommodated in the response.

Thus, if we consider Question 1 (d) – With reference to **one** case study, discuss the impact of flooding on people and the environment. Candidates should recognise the command 'Discuss' and realise that this means there is an analytical component – a need to weigh up the impact on people – and possible different effects - and the environment and come to a view. The concepts of impact of flooding on people and the environment should be understood – a need to consider the effects on residents and perhaps economic and social consequences and how it affected their lives as well as on surroundings – such as landforms, erosion/deposition, infrastructure. The requirement to use **one** case study should be recognised as a limiting factor – with the need to refer to a specific area (which could be in a richer or poorer area) – as so too may the need to consider impacts on two aspects. Thus, the question may be seen as 'Use flooding in Tewkesbury – describe/analyse specific effects on local residents and the surrounding area and come to a view – about relative severity of two parts, varied impacts on people, scale of area/people affected'. In this way, the demands of the question are tailored/adapted to what the candidate has covered from the specification.   This approach should mean that students do not answer a question previously set – which they have done as a practice question and seen the same concept and launched into the same response – without looking at the question in its full context. Candidates should be encouraged to adopt this approach.

Other recurring and key aspects regarding exam technique relate to the need to comply with both command words if two are present to ensure progress through the levels. Candidates should know what a trend is (a change over time) and a pattern (a particular disposition within a specified area) or distribution (dispersal within an area) and appreciate that the last two are not the same as location. There is a continuing need to focus on how to selectively use text – getting the overall sense of what is being said and then utilising it to answer a question, rather than regurgitating large chunks of it in an indiscriminate way. It is interesting to note that where text and a photo or map in Question 2 (c)(i)/(ii) and Question 3 (c)(ii) were both present, the visual stimulus was largely ignored – yet these offered significant help in answering the question and the fact that they were not text based meant that some processing had to be done before writing – rather than just lifting information from the text element.

Too many candidates waste valuable time when responding to the 15 mark questions by having a lengthy introduction which largely repeats back the question, then indicates what is going to be the content and often wrongly comes to a view at the start before any information has been presented. In the context of the 15 mark questions, candidates should be encouraged to come to a view at the end, ensuring that the view matches the preceding content.   There must also be specific facts/figures in support that have been learnt during the course – not just any general view or ideas that might be considered (in an over the garden fence type of discussion). With regard to the extended writing in the Physical Options section this time, candidates were asked to consider **two or more** landforms and a list of those stated in the specification followed. This was designed to help candidates – and there

was a requirement to consider only two – although there was an expectation that these would be in some detail with regard to sequence and process. Where such an approach was adopted, this proved to be successful.

Section A

Question 1 Rivers, floods and management

Part (a) was often well done, with two correct processes obtaining one mark and often some precise knowledge of processes such as hydraulic action and abrasion. Cavitation was often partially known with regard to the build-up of pressure, but not the explosive release. There was some confusion with attrition which was not relevant as the question specified bed and bank erosion. Candidates' responses to (b)(i) were variable. Some saw eustatic change as a rise in sea level and isostatic as a fall; others saw any change in sea level as causing rejuvenation, which was not the case. The best answers focussed on either a fall in sea-level relative to land height or land uplift and the recognition that these led to renewed erosion. Some considered underlying causes.

There were two command words in part (b)(ii). The descriptive aspect was often very general with no clear reference to the contours. Some did recognise the asymmetrical profile, but here there was often confusion in applying the correct ingrown term rather than entrenched. Too many candidates explained generic meanders rather than incised meanders and there was a need to explain how the rejuvenation process led to the deep valley. Figure 2 offered a number of potential opportunities regarding the intensity of the rainfall, the deforestation, and the impact of soil erosion and the building of levees. Those that selected the levees often struggled to use their selected cause, whilst those who used deforestation saw a clear sequence and developed points well. This text extract was usually well used although some lifted information first before going on to use it. However, there is also the need to make an informed choice here and use a reason that can be developed if only one is going to be focussed on. Merely lifting information here gained no credit.

A range of examples was used in part (d). These included Bangladesh (although the relevant year was often not identified), Mozambique and Pakistan from poorer areas and Boscastle, Tewkesbury, Carlisle and Cockermouth from UK and Mississippi and Queensland from other richer areas. A significant number began with reference to cause(s) which were not relevant. Some considered a case study in a richer area of the world and one in a poorer area – answering a different and previous question. Many described the impacts; the better ones in a precise way which related to the case study. However, there was a need to cast a more discerning analytical over the effects to fully respond to the command word and this aspect was the key discriminator. The following extract indicates an appropriate response to a 'discuss' command – *'In Bangladesh, the airport was flooded and so this meant planes could not fly to and from the country very easily.   Damage is also caused to bridges and roads. This affects people because they may not be able to get away to a safer area away from the flooding. Aid and rescue services may not be able to reach people to help them with the effects of the flood. £60million worth of aid was given to Bangladesh to help with the floods, but due to the environmental effects of this flood, aid may not have reached people who needed it most.'*

Question 2 Cold environments

In part (a), most candidates scored 1 mark for identifying permafrost as permanently frozen ground. Some were clearly guessing that it was frost, or a form of nevé, or a layer of ice. The best responses qualified their initial statement with reference to depth or location. Distribution proved to be a significant hurdle to overcome in part (b). Many referred to location only. Thus, the presence of continuous permafrost in Russian Federation is not correct, whilst recognition that the largest expanse of permafrost is in the Russian Federation is correct.   Others struggled to accurately identify exemplars using latitude and longitude coordinates instead using terms such as north of the North Pole. A significant number stated that there was permafrost at and around the North Pole which is not true and perhaps perceived 80 degrees north as the North Pole. Better responses noted the bands of differing types of permafrost and the presence around coastal areas of Greenland only.

The visual dimension to Figure 4 was meant to aid candidates, but this was often disregarded in favour of the text. There was a misconception that tourism had evolved for conservation purposes and although this may be an impact, it is not a cause. Reasons that were valid referred to the desire for extreme environments, to experience something unique with regard to landscape or wildlife and

items such as cost and access. It was possible to stick with the tourism theme in part (c)(ii) that had been suggested in Figure 4, but there was no need to. The key requirement was to go beyond description of problems and perceive what issues were present. If tourism was present, good responses focussed on international agreements and levels of visitors; reference to activities such as fishing and whaling also offered potential Level 2 answers.

Responses to part (d) were variable. The most common answers focussed on a limited number of landforms such as; corries and related arêtes and pyramidal peaks. Often, these were imbalanced with a lot of information on corries and much less on others. A better approach was to consider two less linked landforms where the explanation was more separate. Some merely went through many in a superficial way not really considering either command word fully. The descriptive element varied, from a corrie being a bowl shape to much more precise accounts of the different parts of it and from different views. Sketches were useful, but not very common. The best explanations gave a clear sequence and identified the location of specific processes, explained them and showed an awareness of links between them. Many focussed too much on a single part – often the first part with regard to the formation of ice.

Question 3 Coastal environments

In part (a), good definitions recognised that hard engineering involved man-made structures and worked against natural processes. Some candidates wrote too much for a 2-mark question. Others believed that listing examples equated to a definition. There was good use of the photograph in part part (b). The sea wall and groynes were recognised and many explained clearly how the coast was protected. Some confused the reflection of the waves with refraction and only the best realised the role of groynes in building up the beach as it is this which offers protection from the waves.

Answers to part (c)(i) were often list-like rather than obeying the command to 'outline'. There was a need to appreciate that not all the coastline is protected and to consider why some areas are such as with reference to large centres of population or economic investment. As in Question 2 (c)(i), many candidates disregarded the map or focussed on the text in Figure 6 when answering part (c)(ii). There was some misunderstanding of the information in that it was perceived that the proposals were unsustainable, rather than the existing situation. Use of the map would have reduced this. Often, candidates described the problems rather than developing the source material in the context of issues such as the stress of upheaval, the significance of the historical/heritage /cultural value of the churches etc.

As in Question 2, responses to part (d) were variable. The descriptive element varied but was a key discriminator here. Stating the term arch or stack does not equate to description. For some the presence of simple sketches gave some credit, but this aspect was a disappointing element of this question. The best explanations gave a clear sequence and went on to link to relevant processes; but for many the sequence formed the majority of the answer with a mention of, rather than an explanation of, the relevant processes. Sometimes processes were described in isolation rather than linking to selected landforms.

Question 4 Hot desert environments and their margins

Part (a)(i) demanded a definition of 'mechanical weathering', not just 'weathering'. Thus, there was a need for specific statements regarding the physical breakdown of rock and the lack of any change in the rock itself. The photograph was often well used in part (a)(ii), with specific description of the evidence of mechanical weathering regarding the layers that were visible, the debris at the base and the 'chunks' missing. Explanation often just referred to heating and cooling whilst more discerning candidates recognised the differential heating and the links to expansion and contraction of different layers.

Some candidates appeared not to be familiar with the concept of continentality in part (b), despite its clear inclusion in the specification. Some referred to the global circulation, the presence of high pressure of relief. Candidates who engaged with the question and the concept recognised that it related to distance from the coast and the availability of moisture, and developed this theme. There was a lot of lifting in part (c), and a focus often on desertification and attempts to slow it down, rather than considering the potential for sustainability which was the thrust of the question. Stone walls for example, were often described, but the link to how this offered the potential for sustainability was not made.

For some candidates in part (d), there was a belief that hard and soft rock were responsible for inselbergs, mesas, buttes and wadis, which was not the case. Some of the best answers focussed on wadis and alluvial fans which had been a part of the January exam, and some used landforms resulting from erosion and deposition (other than these) effectively. There was a better standard of description here than on the coasts question especially, and mesas and inselbergs were often clearly and accurately described, but less well explained than others. Again, the need for sequence and process explained and linked to the landform, is an essential component of a good answer.

Section B

Question 5 Population change

In part (a), many candidates were able to access 2 marks by identifying natural change as that determined by birth and death rates – although migration was often not as clearly defined. Better responses noted described difference between those moving in and those leaving and indicated what changes occurred to give rise to an increase or decrease rather than just a consideration of change. There was often good and clear description of Figure 9. Sometimes this was only step by step or in a piecemeal fashion. The command to 'comment on' proved to be a key discriminator as there was a need to recognise the contrasting trends (a term which did not appear to be understood by a substantial proportion) and the overall static nature of the natural change line in contrast to the increase in migration, with the crossover being significant in 1998.

China was prevalent in part (c) although other case studies included Uganda, The Gambia, Italy and France. Some candidates, especially when China was used, described the population policy per se without going on to assess to what extent it had been successful and to provide evidence in support. Candidates should be reminded that it is the evidence that makes the assessment valid and not just an unsupported opinion. The best were purposeful and considered evidence of success, the reduction of the population versus aspects that were unsuccessful, such as gender imbalance.

There were some very good answers to part (d), which were discursive rather than writing about advantages and disadvantages. These candidates perceived the complexity of an ageing population and came to a view. Support was critical often with reference to areas such as Devon or facts such as relative number of days spent in hospital by older people relative to the rest of the population. Some saw mention of the grey pound or grey vote as adequate without going on to elaborate and weak responses gave generalised disadvantages of an ageing population only.

Question 6 Food supply issues

As in Question (2) (a), distribution proved to be a significant hurdle to overcome in part (a). Many candidates referred to location only and wrote about individual countries which is only really valid if highest or lowest values are being considered or in the context of exceptions to a general pattern. As a result, the question proved to be a good discriminator, but candidates should fare better on these standard questions.

There seemed to be limited awareness of the concept of land colonisation which formed the basis of part (b) despite its presence in the specification. There was reference to UK colonies and confusion with land consolidation yet if this had been known by candidates there should have been many accessing descriptive marks and then making the link to increasing amounts of farmed land increasing food supply. There was some confusion with organic sourcing of food, or perhaps a perception that local and organic occur simultaneously. The article, especially the first part, was well used and many used Figure 11 to stimulate ideas regarding a reduced carbon footprint, knowledge about quality of source, income for local farmers. Knowledge appeared much less secure in part (d). A significant proportion of candidates seemed not to know the strategies or were vague. There was confusion regarding pre and post CAP strategies, and a lack of clarity regarding things like quotas and intervention pricing. Even where knowledge of policies was more certain, many failed to make the link to food supply. Instead, there was reference to trade, farmer's levels of profit, and care for the environment.

Question 7 Energy Issues

In part (a), the best candidates' responses engaged with the requirement to describe trends and supported their points with reference to evidence. Some grouped trends, a useful approach, but care must be taken to ensure categories are accurate. Some did not refer to changes over time which was critical and some drifted to reasons - beyond what was required here. There was a need to focus on the workplace in part (b) and to focus on consumption not supply. Where valid strategies were identified such as the use of energy saving light bulbs, placing information in buildings, having buildings with large windows, there was then a need to link these to the ways in which energy consumption could be reduced. Many stopped short of this and therefore, failed to meet the demands of the question. There was also some clear drift into water and its conservation, which was not relevant here.

The text stimulus presented in Figure 13 was less well used than in the other two option questions in Section B. A lot of candidates lifted material without using own knowledge. Better answers considered the impacts on wildlife and the ecosystem more generally than dead birds and considered the scale of the spill or the time to clean it up. Some candidates read part (d) as reliability of energy production from renewable rather than sustainability, and although these may be linked, they are not the same thing. Often answers were descriptive of renewable sources and considered their advantages and disadvantages without the linking those to the demands of the question. Few candidates fully engaged with the pluses in terms of no carbon emissions with negatives such as the cost of technology, and the number of wind turbines needed to supply demand.

Question 8 Health Issues

Most candidates identified contrasts in part (a) and offered evidence from Figure 14 in support. There was a need to manipulate data from the table and not just lift figures and a need to do this accurately to gain credit. There were some vague statements which did not make clear the indicator being referred to. The UK, Cuba and USA (to a lesser extent) were used as case studies in part (b). Some candidates drifted onto reasons for a particular healthcare approach or evaluated its success; this was especially true for Cuba, and was beyond the demands of this question. This question demanded specific knowledge of the approach in the country used such as in the context of the NHS, who it is funded by, the fact that it is state supported, the role of GPs and hospitals, what is provided and for whom, e.g. in the context of free prescriptions or vaccinations. Many knew surprisingly little about the NHS as their chosen case study.

The text was fairly well used in part (c). Generally, relevant parts were selected although there was some lifting. There was often some description of the role of TNCs with regard to providing vaccines in poorer countries or the number of countries in which they were present. However, this did not always translate into a comment regarding their influence on world health which was required to access Level 2. The study of an infectious disease and a non-communicable disease is a popular part of this unit yet the performance on this extended writing question (part d) was disappointing. All too often, candidates considered causes (not in the specification) and responses and any effects on lifestyle, health, impact on families and income without actually engaging with the concept of economic development prescribed in the question. Ideas were often generalised and unsupported. Better answers used evidence of impact of HIV/AIDS in Botswana regarding numbers affected, impact on life expectancy and implications for productivity and costs of treatment and a brake placed on development and then noted costs of coronary heart disease in other areas. Some came to a view without evidence that richer areas could cope better, or that disease affected different cohorts, but again, the need for evidence must be stressed to support and validate such views.