Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Introduction

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

As in previous years the fieldwork in Q3 this series was somewhat mixed – but that is expected for this particular group of learners. 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 and showed some excellent understanding of sampling, methods and techniques (Q3d). Overall, however, there continues to be a marked improvement over time for many candidates and schools.

It should be noted at this point however that the success of this "familiar" part of the fieldwork (all of Q3) really does depend on how suitable the fieldwork is that is set-up by the school itself. It is of course recognised that for this cohort in particular it would have especially challenging during the 2020-2021 period. However, Centres to be reminded to keep the fieldwork aims both manageable and achievable. it's simply too ambitious and unanswerable, e.g. those students who find themselves investigation the impacts of London's Crossrail or similar large-scale projects which are, as yet, incomplete. Schools would be well advised to review the manageability and appropriateness of their fieldwork, particularly whether it is actually possible to reach a realistic conclusion give 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. As might be expected there was variation in the quality of answers but there were many interesting and informed responses.

This year Q5 was the preferred option compared to Q4 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 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) in order to be able to generate a successful answer. Questions which use the command "Identify" e.g. 2(a)(i) need a little context for the piece of information that is being obtained from the resource. Simply writing "pollution" or "noise" without something explicit linking the idea to the resources were unlikely to be credited. Much better practice is to write something like "traffic below houses" or "walls dirty from air / car pollution".

- 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 design and methodology. 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.

QUESTION BY QUESTION FEEDBACK

Question 1 had a focus on the Crowded Coasts part of the specification (Topic 2.3.1). As in previous series, these questions are about responding to the resources which have been provided, i.e. the photograph of Macau provided. 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 mostly successful. There were lots of answers recognising the role of ecosystems e.g. sand dunes or even coral reefs in terms of dissipating ocean energy before it reaches the coast.

Q1b also presented a challenge for some candidates with a lack of clear understanding about conflicts and players. 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 managing coastal areas.

- *Most agree that there is never enough resources available to coastal managers and planners in order to reduce potential conflicts.*
- *Coastal systems are very complex, and some would argue that whatever option is chosen it is a compromise in both time and space.*
- *Sometimes difficult coastal management decisions can be made with little conflict, e.g. Blackwater Estuary, Essex, UK.*

Only a few candidates attempted an "examination", i.e. some sort of evaluative assessment. Instead, may 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 role of a players linked to decisions.

Question 2, by comparison had a focus on the Urban Problems part of the specification (Topic 2.4.1). Again, this threw up some similar difficulties for some candidates as in Q1. The vast majority, however, were able to use the photograph resource to identify the range of problems linked to housing.

2aii) was a little more successful than 1aii. Many candidates were able to correctly write an explanation about a negative impact of informal employment. On occasions, some candidates here provided far too much detail. These are not case-study questions, merely questions requiring a statement of explanation linking "the way", informal employment has created negative impacts.

In Q2b) there were some very good answers which clearly understood ho different players were involved in urban regeneration. Most answers also including a valid and, in some cases, interesting comparison between developed and developing countries. As in previous years, the best answers had 1or 2 well-chosen places with a good level of detail, e.g. supporting data / evidence.

The problem for most however, which acted as a barrier to L3, was that they failed to assess the importance.   Only a few students stated that planners were for example, less important than communities. 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".

Question 3 was the compulsory fieldwork question, examining the fieldwork that the candidates has done themselves (often termed "familiar" fieldwork). As in previous series, Q3a is usually rooted towards the start of the enquiry sequence. Many candidates seemed to struggle with linking a theory to what they had done. It is worth bearing in mind that examiners take a wide interpretation of theories, concepts or even assumptions that could be reasonably tested in relation to fieldwork. Its recommended that centres give more thought to this in preparation for future series.

3b was mostly well understood, with the majority recognising the context of presentation in relation to primary fieldwork and data collection. 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 3. Since this is an explain question, simply stating a technique is not recommended.

3c demonstrated mixed successes since many were unclear as to the significance of "analyse" in the question. Instead, writing about how they collected data which is the wrong part of the enquiry sequence. Again, its 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".

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 '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 design and methodology. This was all too often evidenced by candidates describing the wrong part of the enquiry sequence. The focus for this question was on Stage 3 and Stage 4 (page 69). For this question in particular, candidates are still finding it troublesome to evaluate, preferring instead to list and describe fieldwork techniques and events. 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 Q3 the fieldwork questions cannot simply be describe, and candidates should be reminded of this.

However, given the challenges of Covid-19 over the past 12 months centres and students should be applauded in the way that they were able to provide meaningful 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 5a produced some excellent results from the majority, being able to make sense of the apps and their application in fieldwork.

Q4aii and 5aii were also mostly good quality, with the vast majority managing to get 2 marks.   Clearly their knowledge of smartphone limitations like running out of battery was invaluable!

Q4bi-iii and Q5bi-iii were mostly successful showing how these number skills must have been practised allowing confidence in the exam. Part (iii) was however problematic for some instead calculating the mean rather than the median.   Remember the mathematical skills are outlined in Appendix 1.