



Pearson
Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2022

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In Geography (WGE04)
Unit 4: Researching Geography

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January 2022

Publications Code WGE04_01_2201_ER

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Introduction

This is the January 2022 series for assessment of WGE04: Researching Geography. There were under 20 entries for this unit.

With a small entry it is both inappropriate and potentially misleading to draw too many general conclusions about student performance. However, the following comments are intended to help centres prepare their candidates for future examinations by drawing attention to the most troubling characteristics of the January entry, as well as pointing out the strengths, where appropriate.

Option 1

The pre-release materials gave centres a clear steer as to the broad focus of this question but, disappointingly only a minority of candidates addressed the contention in the question. As is often the case, too many of the reports offered a good deal of largely well-researched case-study information but failed to use that information to address the contention in the title. Thus, very few acknowledged that not all tectonic hazards could be satisfactorily explained by tectonic theory.

The word in the question that was often ignored was 'all'. Intraplate earthquakes were rarely mentioned and explanations of plate movement such as slab-pull and ridge-push did not feature. Of the two elements of the question location was the weaker. However, it would have been good to read reports that went a little beyond the constructive/destructive boundary dichotomy when attempting to explain the magnitude of tectonic events. One or two were aware that, for example, explosivity does not necessarily follow from this division given the important crystallisation rates in the magma chamber but this was not explored beyond a statement. In other words, the pre-release materials might reasonably have been expected to produce just a little more recognition that plate tectonic theory, whilst a truly extraordinary and embracing theory does not answer all the questions in its domain.

Option 2

This option was not answered by many candidates. Those that did had a generally limited range of case-studies that offered some support to the contention in the question asked. As with other options the most obvious weakness was the hesitancy shown in going beyond poverty to explore other explanations of malnutrition.

The use of the phrase 'main cause' in the question was obviously problematic to those candidates who had not explored causal links between other factors such as mobility, age, and the impact of breaks in the supply chain on food supply. For some the report became rather stuck in a supposed rich world / poor world divide with scant regard of the impact of poverty, and indeed other factors, in leading to malnutrition in countries generally regarded as 'developed'.

Option 3

This was the most popular option researched and some of the responses were very thoughtful and well-constructed. As with the other options, the pre-release steers set clear parameters to the range of research required but obviously did not identify the proposition in the exam question. And again, as with other questions and, as in the past, on the ability to deploy well-researched case-study material to answer the question was the key. Introductions occasionally defined key terms but gave no hint as to the focus of the question that was being asked so, for example, they did not address what might constitute 'physical isolation'. In some cases, those that did also recognised that this could be a local rather than a national phenomenon and self-imposed as with some religious communities.

Almost all candidates realised that the phrase 'most variation' allowed them to explore other possible explanations for the 'global variations'; that were the focus of the question. The best answers offered a good balance of case-study evidence and fitted their evidence to the title effectively. For example, evidence from Iceland in the pre-modern era compared with 21st century Iceland was a very effective case-study vehicle for exploring the meaning of 'physical isolation' and how tourism might impact on a culture.

Several answers were not presented in report form but as essays that lacked referencing, a justification of the chosen methodology or coherent introductions and conclusions. This obviously impacted on their mark.

Option 4

Once again, the pre-release sets clear parameters to the range of research required but obviously did not identify the proposition in the exam question. As with other questions in this cycle, as in the past, the ability to deploy well-researched case-study material to answer the question was the key.

The first step in that process was to deconstruct the question which presented a well-flagged relationship in a rather different way. The main issue for some candidates was to confuse trends with absolute positions. The proposition was not that developed countries had more health risks than developing countries but that the direction of travel of those risks was, counter-intuitively perhaps, a growth in risk in some, although not all, developed countries but a decline in some less wealthy countries. The steers in the pre-release certainly directed some candidates down the appropriate pathway to explore inequalities, falling life-expectancy and the rise of endogenous health risks. By contrast, others were able to show that despite some victories in the war against vector born disease in the challenging environments of sub-Saharan Africa it wasn't a consistent picture.

It is important to add that several answers were not presented in report form but as essays that lacked referencing, a justification of the chosen methodology or coherent introductions and conclusions. This obviously impacted on their mark.

Summary

There were many very competent reports that only needed a little more focus on the question asked rather than telling the 'story' of their case-studies, to improve

their mark significantly. However, at the other end of the mark range there were a number of very brief 'essays' that failed to conform to the demands of this report-based examination. It is hoped that this group is a dwindling number.