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Examiners' report

GEOGRAPHY

H481

For first teaching in 2016

H481/03 Autumn 2020 series

Version 1

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

	Reports for the Autumn 2020 series will provide a broad commentary about candidate performance, with the aim for them to be useful future teaching tools. As an exception for this series they will not contain any questions from the question paper nor examples of candidate responses.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

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Paper 3 series overview

This paper is one of three examined components contributing towards the A Level Geography qualification. This paper focuses on:

- analysis of resources of different types
- explanation of spatial patterns and processes
- exploration of synoptic links across the specification
- analysis and evaluation of key ideas.

The paper consists of five Options, two of which candidates must answer questions from. There is no choice of question within an option in Sections A and B. In Section C, two questions are available in each Option, one of which is to be responded to by candidates.

There was a wide range in the quality of scripts entered for this series. At their best, candidate responses wrote with authority and conviction, targeting knowledge and understanding effectively at the question. Less successful scripts offered responses that tended towards the over-generalised and whose knowledge and understanding were at best 'reasonable' (Level 2) but too often fell into the 'basic' category (Level 1)

There was a general insecurity regarding details of real world exemplification that was a feature of even the upper quartile. While responses at this level of assessment rarely require the detailed unpacking of a case study, nevertheless, accurate factual details are persuasive when used to support argument.

Key point call out
Examiners encountered scripts where the handwriting was of such poor quality that considerable numbers of words and phrases were illegible. Centres and candidates are encouraged to try to resolve this matter well in advance of the sitting of a paper so that all of a script can be read and assessed.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:	***Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:***
• Targeted knowledge and understanding towards the actual question set • Wrote fluently and persuasively, especially in Section C • Managed their time effectively to offer full responses in all three sections.	• Wrote over-generalised responses • Lacked attention to the details of real world examples • Wrote pre-learned responses regardless of the actual question set thereby including material that was peripheral or irrelevant.

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Section overview

Section A

Part (a) questions ask candidates to interrogate a resource to identify its limitations as a source of information.

Part (b) questions ask candidates to explain some aspect of the Option's content such as the features of shallow focus earthquakes, the cultural causes of non-communicable diseases or factors influencing bio-diversity in inter-tidal environments.

Section B

The single question in each Option requires candidates to use their knowledge and understanding from across their course of study. Each question asks candidates to assess how an aspect of an Option is influenced or affected by a feature of another area of their course. Examples include how global distribution of communicable disease might be affected by either global trade or global migration; how attempts to increase food production can affect water cycles; how impacts of volcanic eruptions can affect place identity.

Section C

In this Section there are two questions in each Option. These ask candidates to analyse and evaluate aspects of an Option's content using full prose responses to discuss and present arguments. Examples include 'Assess the success of adaptation strategies to reduce the vulnerability of human populations at risk from climate change.' ; 'Examine the extent to which food is a geopolitical commodity.'

Comments on responses by question type

Point marked questions

Section A

Sub-part (a) Most candidates were able to identify two or three limitations of the resources in the two Options they had studied.

The limitations of a qualitative resource such as the photograph used in the Climate Change option or the sketch of an earthquake proof building in the Hazardous Earth option were well known by most. The absence of any information to compare the photograph with so as to gain an insight into glacial retreat was a common theme. The absence of any labelling or additional information regarding construction materials or the purpose of elements of the design of the building were commonplace limitations raised.

Candidates were also secure in their appraisal of data presentation such as the column graph used in Disease Dilemmas. Comments about the need for actual numbers, the lack of data on the actual incidence of the cancer in the population and the need for data on distribution of cancers both spatially and socio-economically were common.

	AfL	When answering Section A questions candidates should be encouraged to write their three limitations as separate bullet points. Too often, due to a muddled paragraph, two limitations can be so entangled that their separate value is not made.

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Level of response questions

Section A

Sub-part (b)

The key aspect of these questions is that the command word 'Explain' should be the focus in candidate responses. Candidates can become side-tracked into offering quite full descriptions that while displaying effective knowledge, nevertheless, restrict themselves to Level 1 as they offer no understanding. Two examples highlight this issue.

The features of shallow focus earthquakes were known by the majority but it was their explanation that was required. That they can cause relatively high levels of damage at the surface despite comparatively low magnitude is because the energy affects only a small area compared to deep focus 'quakes'.

The relationship between cultural factors and disease tended to be securely answered by the majority of candidates. The role of cultural causes such as levels of smoking and or drinking linked with cancers or the consumption of unhealthy foods and low levels of physical activity linked with diabetes and cardiovascular disease (CVD) were examples where candidates offered 'reasonable' (Level 2) or in the majority of cases 'thorough' (Level 3) knowledge and understanding.

Section B

The command phrase used in questions in this section is 'Assess how…'. Candidate responses are allocated to one of four Levels depending on how effectively the command is carried out. The assessment required in each case is a focus on the synoptic link between two seemingly separate elements in the course but which are inextricably tied together.

In the Disease Dilemmas option, the global distribution of communicable disease was linked with either global migration or global trade, both topics from the Human interactions component focused on Global Connections. In the Future of Food option, attempts to increase food production was linked to water cycles, a topic in the Physical systems component in the Earth's Life Support Systems section.

The four Levels are a combination of both AO1 (knowledge and understanding) and AO2 (application of knowledge and understanding) with half of the twelve marks available for a question allocated to each Assessment Objective (AO). It is important therefore, that candidates place sufficient emphasis in their learning for and application to this Section on securing 'thorough' (Level 3) or 'comprehensive' (Level 4) knowledge and understanding. This was most evident in the Disease Dilemmas option when responses assessed the links between communicable diseases and global migration. In this context, both the contemporary Covid19 pandemic and examples such as the H1N1 swine flu outbreak of 2009-2010 were effectively deployed.

It was also encouraging to read some responses in which links were assessed that were set in the past. This historical perspective reflects a broad consideration of geographical patterns and processes which tends to indicate a 'comprehensive' and 'well developed' set of ideas. Assessment of the links between the communicable diseases of bubonic plague and Spanish flu and migrations were usually very effective.

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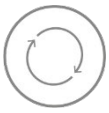
	Misconception	Judging by the tone of the majority of responses, candidates tend to focus on what might be termed the 'negative' aspects of the links. For example, impacts of volcanic eruptions on place identity. In this context the destruction and abandonment of much of the island of Montserrat was quoted. However, advantages to places of volcanic eruptions are equally valid as assessments, such as the legacy of fertile soils, the potential for geo-thermal power or the identity of a place as a tourist destination. Likewise, the link between increasing food production and water cycles. Examples were offered in a few scripts of how both food production and water cycles could be positively affected. In the Sahel, the use of stone walls has raised yields of crops and led to more water being retained for longer with stores such as soil accumulation due to construction of the stone walls. The development and adoption of more effective water delivery systems such as drip irrigation is another example of how both food production and water cycles can be positively linked.

Section C

The assessment of this section benefits greatly from being able to distinguish between AO1 and AO2. The command words and phrases used in the questions focus sharply on analysis and evaluation therefore it is AO2 that receives the majority of the 33 marks available for each question, 24 marks.

	**AfL**	In nearly every case of a Level 3 or 4 response in AO2, there is strong evidence of planning taking place before the essay is written. Candidates are encouraged to use some time to draw up a plan as this is more likely to result in a discussion focused on the actual question set.

Because of the limited numbers entering this particular series, examiners only read responses to a minority of the questions.

Responses in this section should have an opening paragraph that sets the scene for the discussion that follows. In some cases, defining terms can be a useful way to open. For example, outlining what is meant by 'adaptation strategies', 'mitigation strategies' and 'vulnerability'.

The more successful discussions proceed using paragraphs that focus on one particular aspect of the issue. The particular point is then discussed, with the most effective responses making clear evaluation, '…on the other hand…' 'However, ...'

The use of supporting real world exemplification significantly advances a discussion. In the Hazardous Earth option (the most popular), discussions concerning how level of economic development affects the impacts of earthquake activity, examples such as Japan, Nepal, Haiti, Indonesia and Italy were common. Overall, candidates were not as secure as they needed to be regarding factual details for the top Levels in AO1 and a handful confused the impacts of the earthquake that struck Kobe (1995) with the Tōhoku earthquake (2011). Evaluation was generally sound with candidates agreeing with the assertion in the question that higher levels of economic development allowed more successful management of the impacts. It was encouraging to read comments about the abilities of countries such as Nepal to manage impacts of earthquakes rather than simply dismissing LIDCs as incapable of dealing with such events.

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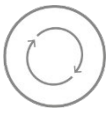
The other question in the Hazardous Earth option asked about the degree to which the ability to manage volcanic activity has improved over time. The examples used to support discussions tended to come from Italy, Iceland, Japan and Hawaii. Much was made of the resources available to a country to deal with the impacts of volcanic activity so that ACs were compared with EDCs such as Indonesia. For some candidates, this contrast in resourcing superseded the requirement of the question to focus on changes through time. There were, however, a couple of helpful comments made regarding the impacts of ash in the atmosphere in connection with flights. The widespread disruption following the eruption in 2010 of Eyjafjallajökull was felt to be less likely today following intensive research into the effects of ash on jet engines. Much was also made of the improvements in technology allowing more effective monitoring and prediction of increases in volcanic activity.

Almost as popular an Option was Disease Dilemmas. Candidates were keen to discuss the extent to which mitigation strategies can successfully reduce the outbreak and impacts of non-communicable disease. Responses generally made effective use of examples such as strategies aimed at diseases including cancers, CVD and diabetes, set in the spatial context of the UK. One indication of a higher Level response was the distinction between direct and in-direct strategies. The former being aimed specifically at a particular cancer type, lung for example in terms of the link with smoking. The latter group of strategies tended to focus on efforts to encourage healthy life-styles through diet and exercise.

The partner question suggested that disease eradication depends on a sustainable use of medicines derived from nature. Most responses quoted the rosy periwinkle as a prime example of the value of a plant in the treatment of disease. Effective references were made to the need to sustainably manage biotic reservoirs of plants such as rain forests so that both known and unknown sources of medicines might be available now and in the future. Evaluation also came from comments highlighting the widespread use made of medicines resulting not from nature but from chemistry laboratories. In this context, the hunt for effective vaccines, in particular to combat the Covid 19 virus was highlighted.

Among the other questions in Section C, only one or two responses or none at all were read which precludes summative comments to be made.

	**AfL**	Continued highlighting and focus on command words. Concise and precise responses especially in Sections A and B. On-going development of standards of literacy, including vocabulary.

Guidance on using this paper as a mock

It may an unfair assessment of candidate's progress to set this as a complete paper depending on when the mock is held in the academic year. It is quite possible to split the paper into two halves thereby using only one Option at a time. However, the length of this paper is beyond the experience of the majority of candidates and setting the complete paper towards the later stages of the course may be advantageous in terms of giving students the experience of planning and executing their time management of such a paper.

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