Version

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General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course)
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Geography A   40304F

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Unit SC1: Physical and Human Geography

Report on the Examination

SECTION A

Question 1: The Restless Earth

The most popular physical geography question.

1(a)(i) Answered well with most students recognising that young fold mountains are located on the west coast of the Americas and in southern Europe. In contrast, whilst many students recognised that ocean trenches are found in the Pacific Ocean, a significant number incorrectly indicated that ocean trenches are always located next to young fold mountains.

1(a)(ii) Whilst identifying two characteristics of ocean trenches proved difficult, most students were able to identify one with the most common response being 'deep'.

1a)(iii) The majority of students were able to gain at least 2 marks, often by identifying a build up of sediment on the sea bed and the two plates moving towards each other. However, the concepts of rivers carrying sediment to the sea and of the rocks being 'squeezed' upwards to form young fold mountains was less well understood .students mostly referred their comments to the illustrations in the boxes, with relatively few students including correct information in the wrong box. In contrast, some of the weaker responses incorrectly interpreted the diagram as being a cross section of a river.

1(b)(i) Whilst many students, were able to identify either the location of the epicentre in Haiti and/or the area affected by shockwaves in L'Aquila, overall a significant number of students failed to use the scales on the maps to accurately measure distances from specified places. Description of the faults evident across Haiti also proved difficult for many students.

1(b)(ii) Well answered. Most students identified in figures the actual magnitude of the two earthquakes and/or that the magnitude of the Haiti earthquake was the stronger of the two. Significantly fewer students accurately calculated the difference in the magnitude of the two earthquakes.

1(c) Although most students were able to gain a mark through reference to 'damage' and/or the 'scale of I-XII', few students were then able to successfully describe the different effects at the various levels. It was also clear that some students appeared much more familiar with the Richter than with the Mercalli scale.

1(d) Generally poorly answered. Whilst many students referred to effects in terms of more 'deaths' and 'damage to buildings' in LEDC's compared with MEDC's, a common error was for students to focus their answer on 'responses' to earthquakes rather than their 'effects' as required. In addition, few students included accurate reference to case study figures to support their answer and when they did these were often listed separately rather than directly compared.

Question 2: Water on the Land

The second most popular physical question.

2(a) Generally poorly answered. Whilst, most students correctly identified at least one process of transportation, most commonly 'solution' and/or traction, relatively few students gained three marks and even fewer students four marks. The processes of 'saltation' and 'suspension' were often confused.

2(b) The reasons suggested for a river depositing its load were wide ranging and not all were accurate with too many references to the load 'becoming too heavy'. Whilst a number of students understood the link between deposition and a loss of velocity/energy and thus gained a mark, relatively few developed their explanation to gain the second mark.

2(c)(i) The correct height was identified by many students.

    (ii)   Most students answered correctly.

    (iii)   The straight line distance was correctly measured by many students.

    (iv)   Whilst, most students identified at least one landform and many two, few students developed their response or identified a third landform.

2(d)   Generally poorly answered with most students describing a floodplain and its use, rather than explaining its formation. Where an explanation was included this often referred simply to the deposition of sediment following a river overflowing its banks with no reference to increased friction/loss of energy or to lateral erosion and the widening of the valley. Some explanations focused on the formation of levees rather than the floodplain itself.

2(e)(i)   Well answered, with most students achieving full marks.

2(e)(ii) Whilst some students focused on 'response to' rather than the 'effects of' flooding this question was generally well answered with most students able to identify a few effects generic to a flood event. The better answers not only named an appropriate case study, most frequently Bangladesh, Boscastle and Cockermouth, but included specific flood details of the effects of this particular flood event. However, some students confused matters by referring to two examples, occasionally with some attempt to compare the two. A few students also referred incorrectly to coastal flooding with reference to, for example, a tsunamis.

Question 3: The Coastal Zone

The least popular physical geography question.

3(a)   The processes of coastal erosion appeared to be well known with many students achieving at least 3 marks. However, the two processes of 'abrasion' and 'attrition' were often confused.

3(b)(i)   Many students correctly identified the feature as a 'nature reserve'.

    (ii)   Many students were able to measure the distance along the spit, although very few were completely accurate.

    (iii)   The quality of the sketch maps varied considerably. Some were excellent in detail and location specific to the grid but others merely provided an incomplete or poorly located outline.
Fewer marks were gained from identifying features of the spit from the map, such as 'sand and mud behind spit'. A common error was simply to copy labels from the map, such as 'Dolphin', 'Old Den' and 'Easington Clay'.

    (iv)   Generally poorly answered with many students showing little understanding of spit formation. Some students correctly linked its formation to longshore drift and the movement of beach sediment along the coast and/or the deposition of this sediment outwards into the sea. However, there were very few developed answers with little reference to the link between the prevailing wind and the direction of the longshore drift, to the required change in the direction of the coastline, or to the formation of the curved spit end caused by winds approaching the coast from a different direction.

3(c)   Whilst many students were able to describe the shape of either a spit or a bar few students were able to clearly describe the difference between the two.

3(d)   Good use of the photographs by most students who gained at least one and frequently two marks, with the most common responses being either 'grass' and/or 'tree(s)' linked to the relevant photograph.

3(e)   Generally poorly answered. Many students identified an area of the coast and then focussed their response solely on coastal protection rather than on strategies to conserve a coastal habitat. Where students chose a sand dune area some strategies were identified such as 'fencing off some areas' but the best answers, which were few in number focussed on areas of salt marsh such as Keyhaven.

SECTION B

Question 4: Changing Urban Environment

The second most popular human question.

4(a)(i)   Well answered. Most students were able to accurately plot the heights of the bar graphs to show the urban populations in both the rich and the poor world, although a few students then failed to shade these bars correctly.

4(a)(ii)   Most students were able to identify reasons for the rapid growth of the urban population in the poor world, either through reference to high birth rates or rural-urban migration; with a smaller number of students able to further develop their response in order to gain full marks by considering, for example, both the push/pull factors associated with rural-urban migration.

4(b)(i)   Well answered with many students able to use the photograph to clearly identify three features that may affect the lives of people living in a squatter settlement.

4(b)(ii)   Generally well answered with most students able to suggest how two/three of the four improvements listed would help the people living in squatter settlements and some students all four.

4(b)(iii) Poorly answered, with most students unable to identify a single feature of a\'Site and Service' scheme and many students making reference instead to 'Self Help' schemes.

4(c)   Most students were able to identify in simple terms one or two effects of rapid industrialisation on the environment in cities in the poor world such as 'air polluted from factory chimneys' but a much smaller number were able to develop their suggestions further to include details about these effects. A few, but a significant number of students, incorrectly focussed their response not on the effects on the environment as required but on the economic effects with references, for example, to the creation of more jobs.

4(d)   A wide range of responses, the quality of which was often determined by the choice of the case study. Where this was poorly defined such as 'the U.K.', 'Blackpool' or 'shanty towns' the students gained few marks. In contrast there were a number of excellent responses from other students who had chosen for example either Curitiba or Bedzed as their case study example and were then able to include much relevant detail on sustainable living to support their answers.

Question 5: Changing Rural Environment

The least popular question on the paper.

5(a)(i)   Well answered. Most students were able to accurately draw the line on the pie chart to show the proportion of people who commute to Clackmannanshire from Stirling and Falkirk, although a few students then failed to correctly complete the shading of the diagram.

5(a)(ii)   Poorly answered. Some students referred to improvement in transport and a desire to live in less congested/more attractive rural areas but few students developed their answer beyond simple statements.

5(b)(i)   Well answered, with most students able to label correctly at least 2 land uses on the photograph, most commonly 'farming' and 'housing'.

5(b)(ii)   Poorly answered. Having chosen 2 land uses in the rural-urban fringe, few students were able to then explain why a location there is an advantage.

5(c) Poorly answered. Few students were able to correctly complete the sentences to show why the features of commercial farming listed have developed in recent years, with many students failing to gain a single mark.

5(d)(i) Poorly answered. Whilst a number of students were able to identify one reason for rural depopulation, few were able to identify two. A common error was to focus on 'pull' rather than 'push' factors.

5(d)(ii) Poorly answered. Whilst some students were able to identify a few effects generic to rural depopulation such as 'the closure of local shops', few students developed their answers beyond simple statements and even fewer linked their answers to an appropriate case study. In a few cases students even selected urban areas, such as Blackpool, as their case study example!

Question 6: Tourism

The most popular question on the paper

6(a)(i) Well answered. Most students were able to accurately plot the percentage of money earned from tourism by Europe and the Americas on the cumulative bar graph, although a few students then failed to shade these sections of the graph correctly.

6(a)(ii) Generally answered well. Most students achieved 2 marks, with references most commonly to 'improvements in air transport' and 'improved living standards' and a significant number of these students were then able to further develop their answers to gain 3 or 4 marks.

6(b)(i) Well answered. Most students recognised at least two of the three extreme environments shown in the photographs with a significant number recognising all three. In contrast some of the weaker responses described these environments simply as 'hot' or 'cold'.

6(b)(ii) Most students were able to identify one or two reasons why there is an increased demand for adventure holiday such as 'young adults wanting a challenge', but few students then developed their descriptions to achieve 3 or 4 marks.

6(c) Well answered. Most students were able to complete correctly at least two of the four statements about tourism: most commonly the impact of a terrorist threat on the number of tourists coming to the UK and the importance of tourism to the British economy. Less well identified was a characteristic of the stagnation phase of a tourist area.

6(d)(i) Well answered. Most students were able to identify one and many gave two positive effects of mass tourism.

6(d)(ii) A wide range of responses, the quality of which was often determined by the choice of the case study. Identification of an example proved problematic for a few students with suggestions of tropical areas which included 'the Lake District.', 'Blackpool' and 'Ibiza'. Others selected a tropical area but then included very generic statements with no specific references to the attractions of their chosen area. In contrast there were a number of good responses from other students who had chosen for example Kenya as their case study example and were then able to include relevant detail on either a named National Park or the Masai culture.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results statistics page of the AQA Website.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion