Version

AQA

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

(Specification 4031)

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)   The majority of students were able to gain at least one mark, most commonly for identifying the location of ocean trenches near to fold mountains. However, a common error was to describe the location of ocean trenches at destructive plate margins which were not shown on Figure 1.

1(a)(ii)   The quality of diagrams varied considerably from simple single diagrams to sequenced cross-sectional illustrations with detailed annotation. In most cases, these diagrams were supported by written explanations. The majority of students were able to gain 3 or 4 marks, often correctly explaining the formation of either young fold mountains or ocean trenches. However, the best responses, of which there were a number, included well sequenced explanations of both landforms.

1(b)   Well answered. Most students were able to gain at least 2 marks, most commonly by identifying that the Richter scale measures the strength of the shockwaves and that the scale is logarithmic. A number of students achieved full marks by including other relevant detail.

1(c)   Well answered. Most students were able to define and identify the difference between the focus and epicentre of an earthquake, although some students confused the two.

1(d)   Most students gained at least 2 marks by identifying two differences/similarities between the earthquakes in Haiti and L'Aquila, although many responses lacked more specific detail such as the calculated distances of the shockwaves in each of the respective areas.

1(e)   A wide range of responses. Whilst many students referred to effects in terms of more 'deaths' and 'damage to buildings' in LEDC's compared with MEDC's and with reference to case study figures, a number of students incorrectly focussed their answer on 'responses' to earthquakes rather than their 'effects' as required. In addition, a number of students who included accurate reference to case study figures to support their answer listed these separately rather than directly comparing the two.

Question 2: Water on the Land

The second most popular physical geography question.

2(a)   Whilst many students correctly identified two processes of transportation few students were able to identify three. The weakest answers confused processes of erosion with processes of transportation or simply referred to the flow of the water in the river as the force which carried sediment.

2(b)(i)   The correct height was identified by most students.
   (ii)   Most students answered correctly.
   (iii)   The straight line distance was correctly measured by most students.
   (iv)   Whilst, most students identified two landforms, few students developed their response or identified a third landform.

2(c)   A wide range of responses. A significant number of students described a floodplain and its use, rather than explaining its formation. Where an explanation was included a number of other students referred simply to the deposition of sediment following a river overflowing its banks or focused on the formation of levees rather than the floodplain itself. The best responses included more detail such as references to the river flooding over a large area resulting in increased friction/loss of energy and the deposition of silt on the valley floor. Few students referred to lateral erosion and the widening of the valley itself.

2(d)(i)   Well answered. Most students were able to describe the location of the flood events in simple terms and thus gain at least 2 marks, with many students recognising clear patterns/temporal changes and achieving full marks.

2(d)(ii)   Generally well answered. Although a few students focused on effects and some students mixed effects with responses, most students focused their answer on responses to a flood event, as required. The weakest answers simply identified a few responses generic to a flood event but the better answers not only named an appropriate case study, most frequently Bangladesh, Boscastle and Cockermouth, but included specific details of the responses such as the amount/form of aid provided. Nevertheless, some students confused matters by referring to one example in an LEDC and another in an MEDC with some attempt to compare the two.

Question 3: The Coastal Zone

The least popular physical geography question.

3(a)   Whilst many students correctly identified two processes of erosion few students were able to identify three. The weakest answers simply referred to the force of the waves crashing against the coast or limited their response to the impact of destructive waves.

3(b)(i)   Most students correctly identified the feature as a 'nature reserve'.
   (ii)   Most students were able to measure the distance along the spit, although fewer were completely accurate.
   (iii)   The quality of the sketch maps varied considerably. Some were excellent in detail and location specific to the grid but some 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)   Many students showed little more than a basic understanding of spit formation, referring 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 relatively few developed answers with a lack of reference to the link between the prevailing wind and the direction of 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)   Most students were able to recognise one or two changes in the vegetation as shown by the two photographs. At a simple level this included statements such as 'short grass near the sea' and 'denser vegetation cover further inland'. However, few students developed their answers to include more specific detail.

3(d)   Generally poorly answered. Many students identified an area of the coast, sometimes as vague as East Anglia and then found it difficult to identify distinct characteristics of a coastal habitat, as required. Where students chose a sand dune area some strategies were identified such as 'pioneer plants' and 'long rooted marram grasses' but the best answers, of which there were relatively few in number focussed on areas of salt marsh such as Keyhaven, with references to plant succession linked to specific plants, and changes in the physical environment with movement inland from the shore.

SECTION B

Question 4: Changing Urban Environment

The second most popular human question.

4(a)(i)   Well answered. Many students identified the overall trend and the difference between the urban populations of the Rich and Poor Worlds and gained 3 or 4 marks. Conversely, a few students relied on direct lifts from the graphs and/or referred to total populations rather than urban populations in the Rich and Poor Worlds, which limited the marks gained.

4(a)(ii)   A wide range of responses. The process of rural-urban migration in the poor world was well understood by the majority of students, resulting in a number focussing their answer on explaining the growth of the urban population in the poor world with little reference to the rich world. However, the best responses, of which there were a number, ensured that the distinction between the two was clear referring to the process of counter-urbanisation and the greater mobility of people in the rich world.

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

4(c)   Well answered with the majority of students able to identify an effect of rapid industrialisation on both the air and water of a poor world city. In addition, many students were able to further develop their response to gain 3 or 4 marks.

4(d)(i)   Poorly answered. Whilst some students were able to identify either one social or environmental factor that might be considered in any plan aimed at sustainable urban living, few students able to identify both.

4(d)(ii)   A wide range of responses, the quality of which was often determined by the choice of the case study. Where this was poorly defined the students relied on gaining marks through a reliance on generic statements such as reference to 'recycling'. 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)   Most responses included simple statements based on direct lifts of information from the map.

5(a)(ii)   Poorly answered. Few students were able to identify more than one characteristic of an expanding village.

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'.

5b (ii)   Poorly answered. The responses were limited to simple statements which showed little appreciation of the potential conflict.

5(c)(i)   Poorly answered. Whilst some students were able to identify either one social or economic reason for rural depopulation few students able to identify both.

5(c)(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.

Question 6: Tourism

The most popular question on the paper

6(a)(i)   Well answered. Many students clearly identified the changes in the percentage of money earned from tourism in different parts of the world between 1970 and 2010 and gained 3 or 4 marks. Conversely, a few students relied on direct lifts from the graphs and/or referred to numbers of tourists rather than the percentage of money earned from tourism, which limited the marks gained.

6(a)(ii)   Most students identified the economic importance of tourism to a specific country/area of the world but relative few students were then able to show the difference in contrasting parts of the world.

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.

6(b)(ii)   Well answered with the majority of students able to identify two ways in which tourism could affect their chosen extreme environment. In addition, many students were then able to further develop their response to gain 3 or 4 marks.

6(c)(i)   Well answered with most students able to identify two positive effects on the environment of the development of mass tourism.

6(c)(ii)   A wide range of responses, the quality of which was often determined by the choice of the case study. Some students 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 excellent responses from other students who had chosen for example Kenya as their case study example and were then able to include much relevant detail on a named National Park, the Masai culture and occasionally a named coastal resort.

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