



General Certificate of Secondary Education

Geography 40301

Specification A

40301F Full Course

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General

This was the first Foundation Tier physical options examination on the new AQA GCSE Geography A specification. Unlike its predecessor paper 3031/1F, geographical skills questions were integrated into the content based questions. These were marked out of 25 and each had a levels marked question which was marked out of 6, as well as 4 – previously the highest mark on a subsection on this paper. As a result of its modular nature, this first paper was sat exclusively by Year 10 students. At times this was clear as candidates struggled to engage with the questions. There was a lack of accomplished exam technique and even straightforward parts such as describing photos were often poorly done. There needs to be greater and more accurate knowledge developed as part of a revision programme with specific case study knowledge incorporated into this. Candidates must refer specifically to the case study selected when asked to do so. Mentioning the name of a particular area but then writing generically is the hallmark of a level 1 rather than level 2 answer. Specific facts, figures or place names are needed to tie the content to the example; geography is about the real world and real places, not non-specific locations. There is a need to obey command words – for example the instruction to describe requires writing with sufficient detail that what is being described can be visualised. This is different to list or identify, although candidates did not necessarily see the contrast. The concepts given in the question also need careful consideration – for example the need to consider the international context in 3(d), not just local/national although this may be a part of a valid response. Similarly, in 7(c)(ii) there was a need to describe costs and benefits, not just describe or note hard engineering strategies. Next year, the cohort will consist of a mix of Year 10 and 11 and relative immaturity for the exam will be less apparent. However, from a centre point of view, greater drilling of exam technique is essential if the modular system is to deliver – and take the pressure off Year 11. The following question by question report has a recurring theme – of the need to de-construct the question and to answer the question asked with a degree of precision.

SECTION A

Question 1 *The Restless Earth*

Responses to (b)(i) and (b)(ii) were variable. This was a result of the differences in accuracy. Only a third positioned X accurately, whilst some located the X in a broader designated area. Many were randomly placed as if candidates were guessing instead of using the compass direction and the six figure grid reference given in the question. Y was the best placed, while Z and the use of the 6 figure grid reference proved problematic for many. About a quarter located Z in the south east part of the square. These basic skills were not well applied here. Some failed to understand even which lines made up the 4 figure reference. In (b)(iii), points made were often general. Some related to the Richter scale or few buildings. Only the best responses – and these were relatively rare - used the map specifically and recognised the presence of woodland and fields. Only a fifth obtained maximum marks indicating purposeful use of the map.

In (c)(i), for many there was a recognition that plates moved and this caused a tsunami. Better responses recognised the sequence, with the earthquake providing the trigger for the tsunami. Over a third of candidates recognised this. The Indian Ocean tsunami of Boxing Day 2004 was almost universally used in (c)(ii). However, very few (3%) described its specific effects, preferring instead to relay the effects of a tsunami generally. Reference to number of deaths and places affected would have lifted responses to level 2. Statements need to be linked and developed, not just listed in a random fashion, to obtain the higher marks. Over half of candidates received between 0 and 2 marks on this questions as their responses merely listed generic effects.

Question 2 Rocks, Resources and Scenery

Only about one third of the candidates selecting this question gained marks on (a)(i). Yet, this is a fundamental part of the course and tested basic knowledge. There is clearly a need to ensure all aspects of the course are covered. Where there was precise knowledge, or recognition that an era is longer than a period credit was available. Some described the timescale literally with reference to coloured parts and labels.

In (b) it was noteworthy how many candidates cited peripheral characteristics – missing the limestone cliff and clear limestone features such as joints and bedding planes. All too often, there was a focus on vegetation and paths which were not the thrust of the question. There is a need to focus on pertinent features and advice on how to describe a landscape is essential.

Few candidates reached level 2 on (d)(ii) as they failed to make reference to the OS map. Often, the candidates seemed to be answering a different question to the one set – describing the location or being distracted by the danger area. Responses were basic – mentioning noise and dust – without developing answers regarding the source of the pollution.

Reference to a case study was problematic in (e). Even generic answers were very basic and brief – referring to jobs, money and little else. There was a need to consider what types of jobs, how local business such as cafes might benefit and to relate this to a named example.

Question 3 Challenge of Weather and Climate

In (a)(ii), for about half of the candidates there was an understanding that London was further south (or “nearer the equator”) but very few went on to develop the point. Many – about half - could not begin to identify a valid reason. The same trend was apparent in (a)(iii). Here, even fewer recognised the importance of one location being near the sea than the other. Yet these questions are testing basic knowledge of temperature variation in the UK.

There was a wide range of responses in (b). Some just lifted relevant parts of the text, whilst better responses noted that it was clearly unusual. The best, and those that accessed level 2 supported the notion of the weather being unusual/not normal by referring to relevant parts of the figure.

About a third of candidates correctly positioned an appropriate shape in (c)(i). This is not an easy skill – to cross reference the resources provided. Another half had an approximation or shaded a square, whilst a third were too inaccurate. Some marked on all areas – clearly going beyond what the question demanded. About half of the responses to (c)(ii) did not answer the question and so scored 0 marks. There was a clear drift in to explanation with suggestions why the area had flooded. The command word was disregarded. Those who did seek to answer the question were often very vague, picking minor features such as the church, or they failed to keep their focus on the relevant area. There was reference to built-up areas, but little reference to the nature of the roads. Only the best sought to describe a picture of the area – many just listed features. Thus, only about a sixth of candidates obtained 2 or 3 marks. Part (c)(iii) was better done with about half of candidates obtaining 2 or 3 marks. Although some believed that everything was destroyed, others gave a more measured view and noted the fact that houses would be flooded, people made homeless for a while, roads blocked etc.

Few engaged with the international scale demanded by part (d) and so remained in level 1. Whilst there was some relevance in looking at local actions the international aspect was essential for level 2. The best referred to Kyoto and what this entailed as well as noting a

variety of local initiatives such as reducing use of fossil fuels, turning lights off etc. About half of those who answered the question obtained top half of level 1 and went into level 2. The hallmark of a low level 1 answer was the list approach or those that looked at cause or effect rather than responses.

Question 4 Living World

In (b)(i), examiners saw a lot of material on tropical rainforest instead of a deciduous forest ecosystem. Approximately a third of candidates recognised the loss of leaves; and about a third of these understood the reason why. Many scored 0 on this question as they failed to focus on the precise requirements of the question. There was a similar response to (b)(iii) where it was all too rare to see deep or wide roots identified and the underlying reason.

There was a failure again to engage with the question asked in (c)(ii). Here most resorted to the list of features – often disregarding whether or not they were in the forest. The camp site was a particular distraction.

The need to identify recreation activities such as walking on the paths was disregarded. Often the content of the answers bore no relationship to the question – with answers on the impact of people, how the forest might be protected and so on. Part (d) was better done – but still many failed to answer the question asked. Some saw it as how wood is obtained, rather than how we try to maintain a supply or enhance it. There were valid references to pollarding and selective felling and replanting when candidates did grasp the question.

The skill of describing photographs proved to be problematic again in part (c). Candidates should describe what can be seen. Often generic descriptions of desert vegetation appeared and the photo was ignored. Temperature, rather than rainfall, was given as a reason. The best noted the changing vegetation – the presence of cactus in Figure 13 and the yellow flowers in Figure 14 – and considered the effect of rainfall. The failure to use a case study in part (f) led to the marks being relatively low on this question and only a small proportion showed an ability to use a case study. More were able to write generically. However, many read 'live' for 'make a living' and many disregarded the need to refer to a poorer part of the world.

Section B

Question 5 Water on the Land

The photograph was better described than the one in Question 2, but still too few accessed what should have been straightforward marks. There was recognition of the plunge pool and the gorge and the best responses noted the stepped profile. Too many failed to describe the waterfall, despite the demands made by the question. There were some very good responses to (b)(ii) where candidates drew either one, two or even three or four diagrams to identify the sequence and process involved in waterfall formation. There was a need to recognise the position of the layers of hard and soft rock and the differential erosion that occurred. Some merely drew the photograph, some described. Many had the second part of the sequence only.

In (c)(ii) few recognised the fact that relief may be different or the fact that one may have an impermeable surface. Too many referred to differences in the amount of rainfall, even though the question stated it was the same storm. Flood management was another invalid suggestion as candidates failed to engage with the factors affecting discharge. In (d), a third of the candidates failed to score and those who did tended to reach low level 1 only. Many considered the cause of flooding, why there has been an increase in the demand for bottled water or how water resources can be conserved. All these simply did not answer the question. The better

responses considered an increasing population, the amount wasted and so on, with some development.

Question 6 Ice on the Land

In (a)(ii), most scored 1 or 2 marks as Y was usually correctly placed with either X or Z. There was a need for accuracy and whilst there were alternative answers for Z, no part of the period should have gone above 15 degrees Celsius. About a quarter of candidates attempting the question got the maximum marks. There was a limited use of the evidence in (b) which was needed to access level 2. Most were able to access level 1 usually by going step by step describing the rise or looking at the start and end points only. Few did both and had evidence to support.

Only just over a third who answered (c)(i) accessed any marks. There was a need to describe rather than just define the process. Thus, there could have been reference to the use of the material being carried, the source of the material and the way in which ice uses the moraine to grind the base and sides of the glacier. While some correctly identified two landforms resulting from glacial erosion in (c)(ii) too many did not have the necessary knowledge available.

The command in (d)(i) was to describe but answers consisting of little more than lists were a frequent occurrence. Better responses noted contrasting attractions between summer and winter and illustrated opportunities for winter skiing and summer hiking. The lack of case studies was again problematic in (d)(ii). So too was the tendency by many not to answer the question asked which related to management. Many just answered their own question and described the attractions. Where management was addressed, suggestions were general such as restricting access and charging people. Very few used an appropriate case study, such as the French Alps. Those who did scored well.

Question 7 The Coastal Zone

In (a)(iii), there was a need to use the diagrams to establish a sequence in the formation of cliffs and wave cut platforms. There was some confusion with headlands, arches and stacks and even waterfalls. Some simply described the images in the figure rather than obeying the command word to explain. About 10% obtained the maximum marks available, with a further 25% obtaining 3 marks.

In (b)(i), there was a recognition of global warming leading to the melting of ice caps and a significant number considered the impact of warming on the water leading to thermal expansion. The question was relatively well done, although some were apparently guessing and suggested that it may rain more, more waste would be dumped or there may be more deposition. The lack of specific use of a case study precluded some candidates from entering level 2 in (b)(ii). There were many generic statements – again with a tendency to list rather than describe. Similarly, there was a limited focus on economic effect – and the failure to meet the requirements of the question was again apparent. Some referred wrongly to river floods such as Boscastle and the Severn.

Many scored 1 or 2 marks in (c)(i). A significant number sought to use the diagram and recognised that the groyne would offer little protection and the sea wall was likely to crumble. There was no credit for lifting labels from Figure 23 – the question demanded explanation. Some tried to write the labels out in a sequence though these often made little sense. About half of the candidates accessed the upper end of level 1 in (c)(ii), with far fewer going into level 2. Most were aware of costs and benefits, but often these were basic. Greater linking and development was necessary for level 2. Some described the methods without spelling out the required costs and benefits.