Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCSE

In Geography A (1GA0)

Paper 02: The Human Environment

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Introduction

This was the third series of the Pearson Edexcel GCSE (9-1) Geography A specification. This Examiner's Report is intended to provide an insight into performance on Paper 2– The Human Environment component – in particular, analysing the majority of questions in terms of what went well and where common mistakes and underperformance were evident. It should be noted, however, that the entry for this series was very small and the candidates may not have been representative of a 'normal' cohort – and that the conclusions drawn in this report are based upon a relatively small number of candidates.

The structure of the paper remains the same and is outlined below; please note that this (and future) question papers are based upon Issue 3 of the specification.

This paper consists of three sections, and that the total of 94 marks includes up to 4 marks awarded for spelling, punctuation, grammar and use of specialist terminology. The exam includes multiple-choice questions, short open, open response, calculations and 8-mark extended writing questions. The command words which are used in this paper are defined on page 43 of the specification. Each of the questions is mapped to one or more of the Assessment Objectives (AOs).

In Section A (Changing cities) and Section B (Global development), candidates are required to answer all the questions. In Section C, candidates are required to answer Question 3 and then either Question 4 (Energy resource management) or Question 5 (Water resource management). Section C have a mark tariff of 34, which includes the 4 marks for spelling, punctuation, grammar and use of specialist terminology. As in 2018 and 2019, the Energy resource management topic on Section C proved the most popular out of the two options.

Overall, candidates in this series tended to perform well compared to the previous series on the 'calculate' questions (AO4) and the 'explain' questions (AO1+AO2); however, the assessment of application and interpretation (AO3), including the addressing of the 'suggest', 'assess', and 'evaluate' command words once again seem to have proven challenging for a number of candidates.

Question 1 (a) (ii)

Most candidates were able to say that Dhaka's population had increased for one mark, and often extended this description by using supporting data; for example, candidates could manipulate the data by stating that the population had increased five-fold, or that there had been an overall increase of 11.7 million. The most common error made by candidates on this question was to suggest reasons for the increase, which is not a requirement of the command word, 'describe'. Both of the examples in the mark scheme that show how full marks could be awarded were frequently seen in candidate responses.

Question 1 (a) (ii)

This question required candidates to calculate the mean in-migration rate for Dhaka (AO4), by adding up the data for each of the years, and then to divide this number by 4. It was encouraging to see many candidates attaining full marks on this question by showing their working and writing the answer to two decimal places – an improvement in candidate performance when compare to 2018 and 2019. However, several candidates incorrectly wrote the answer to three decimal places, and some added up the numbers from the incorrect column in Figure 1a.

Question 1 (b)

This question was done particularly poorly by candidates, and it was clear that many either did not know what the term 'site' meant, and if they did, were unable to offer anything beyond a generic answer. Many candidates incorrectly opted to describe what a city was like now or confused the term 'site' with the term 'situation'. Better examples referred to Mexico City's original site (Lake Texcoco), although some candidates mis-read the question and used the example of Birmingham – which is not a major city in a developing/emerging country.

Question 1 (d)

Most candidates were able to state one reason why deindustrialisation has taken place in some UK cities. The most common response linked to the first example in the mark scheme about the availability of cheaper labour/manufacturing abroad. Common errors on this question were made by candidates who either defined the term 'deindustrialisation' or stated an effect of deindustrialisation on a city, for example out-migration or increased unemployment.

Question 1 (e)

This scaffolded 'explain' question had 4 marks available with candidates required to develop two different reasons why urbanisation occurs at different rates around the world. Many candidates were able to provide two reasons why this happens by referring to i) increased economic development in a country, ii) rural to urban migration, or iii) falling death rates in urban areas. More successful candidates were able to develop at least one of these reasons; however, some candidates clearly misunderstood the term 'urbanisation' – occasionally confusing this with 'counter-urbanisation'. Also, a relatively common error by some candidates on this question was to describe problems of rapid urbanisation rather than explaining why it is happening in the first place.

Question 1 (f) (i)

It was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates were fully equipped to answer this question, with most being awarded full marks for the accurate plotting of the data onto Figure 1b.

Question 1 (f) (ii)

Performance on this question was quite variable, with a large proportion of candidates misinterpreting either the question, or the resource (Figure 1b). These candidates tended to provide reasons for the population change (e.g., increasing life expectancy, increasing in-migration, better health care, falling death rates etc.) rather than suggesting how these changes might affect Brighton. Another error made by a number of candidates was to simply describe the population change shown in Figure 1b, rather than applying their knowledge and understanding to state a possible impact(s) of this change (AO3).

Question 1 (g) (i)

This question was generally answered very well by candidates. Common responses referred to the shops / shoppers in Figure 1c as being evidence that this area is the Central Business District (CBD).

Question 1 (g) (ii)

This 'Explain two…' question for 4 marks (AO1+AO2) was generally done quite well, with candidates demonstrating a secure level of knowledge and understanding about the changes in retailing in recent times – and how these have led to the decline in the CBD in some UK cities. Many candidates were about to explain why the growth

in online shopping (often within the context of the Lockdown in 2020) has had a negative impact on CBDs. The main error made by a very small proportion of candidates was to refer to the growth in 'shopping centres' (which can, of course be located in CBDs) rather than explicitly saying 'out-of-town shopping centres'.

Question 1 (h)

The command word in this 8-mark question was 'evaluate' which requires candidates to appraise different strategies and come to a definitive conclusion. It is expected that a response attaining Level 3 on this question (7-8 marks) would review at least two different strategies used in a named UK city aimed at making urban living more sustainable / improving the quality of life and bring these ideas together to form a conclusion. This conclusion would be based upon evidence such as the strengths and weaknesses of the specific strategies and could refer to extent that these have been successful, and/or which strategies have been most successful.

The best responses to this question used London as a case study and explained how different transport strategies aimed to make urban living more sustainable in this city. However, it was disappointing to see that a large proportion of candidates failed to progress further than a low Level 2 (4 marks) on this question, and often wrote a generic answer about 'improving public transport' or 'using more renewable energy' to 'reduce global warming'.

Many candidates provided a brief description about one or two strategies but did not explicitly link these to the concept of sustainability.

Some candidates simply wrote incorrectly about the pros and cons of living in a city compared to the countryside.

Question 2 (a) (ii)

This question required candidates to describe one trend on the graph (for Zimbabwe); this could be done via two separate statements or one developed point. Overall, candidates performed well on this question, with many attaining full marks.

Question 2 (a) (iii)

This 'suggest' question required candidates to apply what they had learnt during the 'overview' section of the course (linked to HDI) and apply it to the information in Figure 2a (AO2+AO3). Many candidates found this challenging, and performance on this question was quite poor. A number of candidates correctly identified possible improvements in healthcare or investment in education – but many candidates demonstrated a limited understanding about how HDI is calculated, e.g., referring to

infant mortality rates. Some candidates also failed to address to question and incorrectly cited 'population growth' as a reason why Cuba's HDI may have increased.

Question 2 (a) (iv)

The first three examples on the mark scheme were the most common response from candidates to this question; a small proportion of candidates also mentioned that Figure 2a is biased as there is an unequal sample of developed/emerging vs developed countries. Less successful candidates simply stated that the graph was 'not accurate' which was too vague for a mark to be awarded.

Question 2 (b) (ii)

This 'plot the data' question to complete a triangular graph proved extremely challenging for the majority of candidates, with very few actually being awarded one mark. It is perhaps worth reminding candidates that they need to be able to interpret and extract information from different graphs and charts, including triangular graphs as mentioned in the 'graphical skills' section of the specification (page 33).

Question 2 (b) (iii)

Whilst it was clear that many candidates understood the term, 'primary sector', but found the application of this understood to the context of the question quite challenging. Those candidates who were successfully on this question often referred to 'few secondary / tertiary job opportunities' or 'there is a high demand for agricultural / mined products from Kenya'. A small number of candidates correctly suggested a reason why farming might be important in Kenya by citing a physical factor e.g., 'there is fertile/ good soil for farming in Kenya' or 'there is an ideal climate for growing certain crops'.

Question 2 (b) (iv)

In this question, candidates were asked to apply their knowledge and understanding from their own case study of development in a developing/emerging country and suggest why an increase in the tertiary sector in the Seychelles might have a positive impact on the country. Overall, many candidates were able to receive one mark on this question, struggling to develop their initial idea through further explanation. The more successful responses referred to 'more job opportunities' which 'reduced poverty' and 'allowed the country to develop'; however, there were also a number of candidates who failed to score on this question because they suggested possible reasons for the growth in the tertiary sector, rather than a possible impact of this increase.

Question 2 (d)

In this question, candidates were required to negative one negative social impact, and one negative economic impact of rapid development – and these impacts could be quite generic. Generally, this question was done well, with many candidates able to identify two reasons, and some of the stronger responses developing one or both of these reasons. In terms of how well each section was answered, the 'social' reason tended to be better than the 'economic' reason, with a small proportion of candidates appearing to mis-read the question, going onto explain an 'environmental' reason instead. Common responses that gained credit were linked to the rapid population growth of some areas, leading to overcrowding and resultant increases in crime or unemployment.

Question 2 (e)

This 8-mark 'assess' question required candidates to consider a range of impacts caused by the international strategies used to reduce uneven global development. Therefore, it is expected that a Level 3 response would consider these impacts and identify which are the most important / significant with regards to actually reducing the global development gap. Overall, performance on this question was disappointingly weak, with the majority of candidates unable to draw upon what they had learnt about the ways in which international strategies can be used to reduce global variations in the level of development. There were quite a large number of candidates who failed to score any marks on this question – and quite a few blank responses. However, there were some stronger responses, which were able to assess the impacts of international aid and intergovernmental agreements – but these responses were quite rare.

Question 3 (b)

This 1-mark 'define' question was generally answered well, with the majority of candidates correctly writing 'the living parts of an ecosystem' – or similar – for one mark.

Question 3 (c) (ii)

The majority of candidates were able to perform the calculation accurately to arrive at the correct range for the percentage of the population who were undernourished in 2016 (AO4).

Question 3 (c) (iii)

It was pleasing to see that candidates had addressed the issue from previous series of failing to show all workings in their answer; this meant that many candidates were awarded two marks on this question – and a much smaller proportion of candidates compared to previous series were restricted to one mark for the failure to either show their workings or to write their answer to one decimal place.

Question 3 (c) (iv)

A small proportion of candidates were able to address the command word 'suggest' and provide at least one developed explanation about why farming could lead to negative environmental impacts in Africa. The best responses focussed on either the impacts of cattle farming (increasing methane / greenhouse gas emissions which exacerbates climate change) and/or deforestation (and the consequences for climate change or biodiversity). Less successful responses merely suggested why farming is not really an option in some areas (due to poor soil / drought) – which is not what is required in this question.

Question 4 (b) (ii)

As this question is about 'trends', responses need to include some notion of change over time. Good answers, scoring full marks, referred to 'overall, the proportion of coal and natural gas remained the same between 2015 and 2015, at about 50%'. However, some candidates did not incorporate any use of data in their answer and were therefore restricted to a maximum of one mark. Some weaker responses opted to describe one pie chart only – and therefore failed to address the command 'compare the trends'. A small number of candidates failed to score any marks on this question because they gave possible reasons for the trend, rather than just comparing the trends.

Question 4 (b) (iii)

In this question, candidates were required to suggest a possible reason why the proportion of natural gas has increased in Figure 4. In addition to the examples on the mark scheme, there were quite a few pleasing responses for this question that mentioned that the environmental impacts / greenhouse gas emissions were actually lower than for coal – and therefore contributes less towards global warming. A small proportion of candidates appeared to misunderstand what 'natural gas' is and provided a response that focused on methane or carbon dioxide; some responses also incorrectly classified natural gas as being 'renewable'.

Question 4 (c)

The majority of candidates were able to state one negative impact of developing wind power on the environment for one mark. However, a small proportion of candidates stated a social or economic reason (rather than environmental) such as 'expensive set-up costs' or 'unreliable supply of electricity' which did not gain credit.

Question 4 (d)

This question was generally answered well, with candidates often being able to identify two disadvantages of uranium, and a pleasing proportion of these able to develop at least one of these disadvantages through further explanation. All of the examples from the mark scheme were observed across the cohort, including other legitimate responses such as, 'non-renewable' and 'challenging to find enough quantities to make it economically feasible to mine'. Several candidates wrote, 'it's expensive' – something that did not gain credit unless linked to the cost of mining / set-up costs. Comments such as, 'it causes lots of pollution' also did not gain credit as this is too vague.

Question 4 (e)

The command word of this 8-mark question was 'evaluate'. This is used for extended writing questions in which candidates must appraise things and come to a definitive conclusion.

While the mark scheme identifies the indicative content, this is not an exhaustive list and candidates were awarded marks for relevant understanding, interpretation and skills which were not listed. Ultimately, when deciding on the final mark, examiners use the level descriptors to allocate a 'best fit' to the response and then decide where the response falls within the level. The level descriptors are the same for all 'evaluate' questions within this paper and across all the papers in both GCSE Geography specifications.

In the case of 'evaluate' questions, the assessment objectives which are being examined are AO2 (4 marks) and AO3 (4 marks). To secure the AO2 marks, in the context of this question, candidates were required to describe and explain the ways that energy resources are managed in two named countries. Therefore, there is a requirement for candidates to focus on to specific locations; most of the responses that were seen were quite generic, but there were some good responses that accessed level 2 and level 3 which referred to a named location such as Bhutan, Norway, China (e.g., Three Gorges Dam project), India, Germany (e.g., Bavaria Solar Park) and the UK. However, it was usually the quality of explanation, with some reflective comment, that lifted a response up into level 2 and beyond rather than the

use of quality case study information; one would expect a combination of both for level 3.

In terms of the AO2 marks, there appeared to some confusion between some key terminology; for example, some candidates thought that 'electricity' and 'energy resources' were the same thing. Others described energy-saving strategies (e.g., turning off the lights) in the home – not really answering the question. Some candidates also incorrectly explain why the UK has developed fracking – something that has not happened at the time of writing.

In relation to the AO3 marks, the command word 'evaluate' requires candidates to write a balanced argument which addresses the question. It also requires candidates to write a logical answer where the argument presented makes sense and is supported by the evidence presented. Finally, while not explicitly requiring a final concluding paragraph, the command word 'evaluate' does require candidates to ultimately provide a substantiated judgement/ conclusion. There were some good answers which reached level 3 where candidates had a final, concluding paragraph but had also made evaluative comments through their responses (usually at the end of each paragraph).

Question 5 (b) (ii)

As this question is about 'trends', responses need to include some notion of change over time. A large proportion of candidates were awarded two out of three marks on this question by identifying an increase in water stress in both countries – with some use of data. However, only a small number of candidates compared the amount of increase, for example by saying that Botswana is predicted to have a greater increase in water stress. As with the parallel question 4 (b) (ii), a small number of candidates failed to score any marks on this question because they gave possible reasons for the trend, which is not a requirement of the command word, 'compare'.

Question 5 (b) (iii)

In this question, candidates were required to suggest a possible reason why the amount of water stress was predicted to increase in Figure 5. Overall, this question was very well answered by the majority of candidates, and all of the examples provided on the mark scheme were used in the scripts that were seen prior to writing this report.

Question 5 (c)

The majority of candidates were able to state one reason why some countries use a high proportion of their water resources for agriculture for one mark. The most

common responses were the last two examples on the mark scheme – referring to the low levels of rainfall that a country may have, or the use of water resource to maximise crop yield.

Question 5 (d)

When compared to the parallel question 4 (d), this question was not answered as successfully by candidates. Nevertheless, a number of good responses were seen, where candidates had explained why the UK has levels of water consumption and issues related to an ageing infrastructure (e.g., leaking pipes) and seasonal rainfall / highest levels of rainfall are not within close proximity of the large urban areas in the UK where demand is the highest. A small number of candidates appeared to misunderstand that question and provided an explanation about why there are water quality (rather than supply) problems in the UK.

Question 5 (e)

As with the parallel question 4 (e), the command word of this 8-mark question was 'evaluate'. This is used for extended writing questions in which candidates must appraise things and come to a definitive conclusion.

While the mark scheme identifies the indicative content, this is not an exhaustive list and candidates were awarded marks for relevant understanding, interpretation and skills which were not listed. Ultimately, when deciding on the final mark, examiners use the level descriptors to allocate a 'best fit' to the response and then decide where the response falls within the level. The level descriptors are the same for all 'evaluate' questions within this paper and across all the papers in both GCSE Geography specifications.

In the case of 'evaluate' questions, the assessment objectives which are being examined are AO2 (4 marks) and AO3 (4 marks). To secure the AO2 marks, in the context of this question, candidates were required to describe and explain the ways that water resources are managed in two named countries. Therefore, there is a requirement for candidates to focus on to specific locations. The use of named examples on this question was weaker than that seen on 4 (e), but there were still a small number of candidates that used exemplification (e.g., USA, Ethiopia and Sudan) to support their answer. However, it was again quite common that the quality of explanation, with some reflective comment, lifted a response up into level 2 and beyond rather than the use of quality case study information; as with 4 (e), one would expect a combination of both for level 3.

In terms of the AO2 marks, a number of candidates appeared to devote too much of their response explaining why an area needs to manage their water resources, for example in the event of a drought; whilst this might provide useful contextual

information, the main thrust of the question is the management strategies that have been used to combat these problems.

In relation to the AO3 marks, the command word 'evaluate' requires candidates to write a balanced argument which addresses the question. It also requires candidates to write a logical answer where the argument presented makes sense and is supported by the evidence presented. Finally, while not explicitly requiring a final concluding paragraph, the command word 'evaluate' does require candidates to ultimately provide a substantiated judgement/ conclusion. As with question 4 (e), there were some good answers which reached level 3 where candidates had a final, concluding paragraph but had also made evaluative comments through their responses (usually at the end of each paragraph).

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Candidates should be able to define all the key geographical terminology in the detailed content: For example, a secure understanding of the terms 'site' (Q1(b)), 'sustainable' (1(h)) and 'tertiary' (2(biv)) was not evident from a number of candidates in this examination series. Also, 'environmental factors' in Q3c(iv) were confused with 'economic factors' by a small proportion of candidates.

- Performance on the 'calculate' questions (AO4) in this series appeared to be much stronger than in 2018 and 2019; it was pleasing to see candidates show their working where needed, and to adhere to the demands of the question, for example to write an answer to one decimal place.

- The 8-mark extended writing responses often require candidates to include knowledge from the case studies and located examples listed in the specification. It is important that candidates use this information to support their response and avoid producing a generic answer. For example, in question 2(e), there was an opportunity for candidates to include case study information that they would have learnt from key idea 5.6, in addition to the content that would have been covered in key idea 5.4.

- When answering the 8 mark 'evaluate' questions, ensure that candidates understand that they are required to measure the value of something and, ultimately, provide a substantiated judgement/ conclusion.

- In this series, a number of candidates appeared to find the 'suggest' questions very challenging and struggled to apply their knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar contexts and scenarios. They should be reminded that these types of question target AO3, an assessment object that covers 35% of the total marks available for this GCSE course.

- The graph-completion questions were generally done well, with the exception of the triangular graph (Figure 2b) in Q2(bii). Candidates are reminded that they should be familiar with a range of different graphs and charts as detailed in the specification (page 33) aswell as those included within the 'integrated skills' section for each topic.

- In questions where they are asked to develop a single reason (e.g. 'explain one...'), it is important to ensure that the appropriate number of links in the explanatory chain are developed. The number of marks should be used as a guide to achieve this.

- A small number of candidates attempted both Question 4 and Question 5 on Section C. Centres are encouraged to use the Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs), specimen papers and the materials from 2018, 2019 and this

examination series to help familiarise candidates with the structure of the paper; this will hopefully avoid situations where the rubric has not been followed. Centres should spend time reviewing the other support materials via the qualification page on the Pearson website. This will help candidates become more familiar with the range of command words and how they are attached to different Assessment Objectives.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx