GCSE

Geography B

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J385**

OCR Report to Centres

January 2013

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Geography B (J385)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

Overview

Many centres took the opportunity to enter Year 11 candidates for unit B561 (SDME) and it seems that this has become the most popular time to enter candidates for this assessment. A number of centres also took the opportunity to re-enter candidates for the SDME assessment in the hope of improving candidates' grades from June 2012. Centres also took the first opportunity to enter candidates for the 2013 titles of unit B562 (Controlled Assessment). However, more centres will enter candidates for this component in June.

Centres are reminded that this was the last January examination for B561. In 2014 the only opportunity to enter candidates will be for the June examination and this entry must be at the end of the course. Similarly centres will only be able to enter candidates for the B562 assessment in June at the end of the course, although work can be completed at any point during the candidate's course.

Centres are also reminded that the format of the B561 assessment will change in 2014. Centres will not receive pre-release material on the SDME topic, neither will the title of the decision making topic be released in advance. To allow candidates more time to study the resource booklet the examination will be extended to one and a half hours.

The format of the B562 (Geographical Enquiry) assessment also changes in 2014 with the removal of the Geographical Investigation and the addition of these marks to the Fieldwork Focus task, which will now be a task of 2000 words.

Centres are now familiar with the requirements of controlled assessment, in particular the regulations on levels of control. Centres produced a variety of work on the Fieldwork Focus titles provided by the examination board. They also used different approaches in selecting their Geographical Investigation titles. Centres are reminded that titles change each year and centres need to be aware that the titles correspond to the year of submission, which may not be the same as when the task was undertaken.

Centres are more familiar with the demands of the SDME and made thorough use of the pre-release material. It is worth reminding centres that the theme being assessed by the SDME will change for June 2013 and the future areas of focus in this assessment are already published by the examination board. Centres may enter candidates at either the foundation or higher tier of entry. This may be different from the tier of entry of the Key Geographical Themes examination taken at the end of the course.

The varied nature of the assessments allowed all candidates to demonstrate their strengths and there were many excellent examples of high calibre geography. Many centres have obviously put a great amount of time and effort into preparing their candidates and they are to be commended on this. However, one concern expressed by examiners is the poor standard of handwriting of some candidates which made it difficult to read and understand some answers. Centres are recommended to study the reports of the three assessment components submitted or taken in January 2013. They give many pointers to how candidates may improve their chances of success. The reports are based on the comments of examiners and moderators who were responsible for judging the work of candidates.

The professional development website also contains feedback on the June 2012 examination components which may also be useful to centres in preparing candidates for the summer 2013 series of examinations and assessments.

B561/01 Sustainable Decision Making (Foundation Tier)

Overall Comments

This paper was successful in producing a range of results across the candidate profile. The resource booklet was easily accessed and there was evidence that candidates were familiar with the content. All questions were answered and there were few rubric errors, with those candidates who failed to answer some sections of the paper doing so because they were unable to rather than through any misinterpretation of the paper's requirements.

Candidates did well on the earlier skills based questions and many reached Level 2 on the questions where extended writing was required. Handwriting was mostly legible and a good range of appropriate geographical terminology was seen and correctly spelt.

Teachers are reminded that the structure of the questions will vary year on year and that the resource booklet can be used as a base from which to teach the topic area covered. Actual examples and local knowledge should also be included in this as this will allow candidates to do more than just repeat content from the resources without discussing that content and fully developing their answers.

Candidates should be more clearly instructed to visibly label any extra answers they write on the additional pages, as it can be difficult to work out which question the candidate is answering without this. Centres should also be reminded that there is really no need for any candidate to be given 'extra paper' as there are enough additional pages within the answer booklet.

Individual question comments

Question 1

Most candidates achieved full marks on this question.

(a) Almost all candidates achieved the mark for this question. Of those that did not, some gave the wrong answer, some circled both answers and some left the answer blank.

(b) (i) The majority of candidates achieved this mark. Those that did not tended to give either a figure outside the range allowed or a range of figures that included a percentage figure outside the allowed range.

(ii) Almost all candidates achieved the mark for this question. Those that did not usually ticked more than one box.

(ii) Almost all candidates achieved the mark for this question. Those that did not tended to give a range that included a year outside the accepted answer.

Question 2

The majority of candidates achieved 4 marks or more on this question.

(a) (i) Almost all candidates achieved the mark for this question. Those that did not tended to give the answer 45 – 65, showing candidates had not read the graph correctly.

(ii) The majority of candidates answered this question correctly. Incorrect answers tended to be given as the age range 0-15.

(b) The majority of candidates scored at least 2 marks on this question. Candidates were usually able to achieve the 2 reason marks, but were less able to develop their answers. The best answers related their reasons eg more jobs in urban areas to the fact that the under 45's were still of working age and so needed a job.

Question 3

Most candidates scored at least 3 marks on this question.

(a) Many candidates could explain the term 'nimby' by at least giving the acronym, to achieve 1 mark. The best answers then related this to reasons why these 'local' people would not want new developments in their area.

(b) Half of all candidates were able to achieve full marks for this question.

Question 4

Many candidates scored at least 4 marks on this question.

(a) The majority of candidates achieved both marks on this question. Those that did not wrongly referred to 'nimbys'.

(b) The majority of candidates were able to achieve Level 1, 2 marks by listing transport methods or facilities with no development. The best answers were those where the candidate was able to give specific developed examples eg OAP's free bus pass (freedom pass in London), Boris' bikes, Croydon trams and congestion charging in London.

Question 5

There were some well-developed answers, applying the concept in context. Some made relevant use of the resources, especially the map, with the best candidates making more extensive use of the whole resource book and their own knowledge. Some candidates muddled Option 1 and Option 2 within the answer and/or failed to recognise the change in focus of the question for 5b and c. Some candidates seemed to focus on the airport throughout, at times assuming that it would still be there.

(a) The majority of candidates were able to access Level 2 on this question, giving some explanation of the material from the resources.
For Option 1 good answers often recognised that it would make a more significant contribution to reducing Britain's housing crisis; that the development of this town would create jobs and that the integrated nature of the town would decrease traffic and so air pollution.
For Option 2 good answers tended to focus on the benefits of building on a brownfield site.

(b)   The majority of candidates scored at least one mark on this question. Those who only achieved 1 mark often did so as they gave a series of unrelated reasons, rather than fully developing one of these reasons. The loss of the airport was a frequently given answer.

(c)   Many weaker candidates did not understand or recognise 'rejected' and so repeated points from 5(a). The advantages for the environment were often better developed than those for people. The most frequently given answers for the environment were based on the retention of open space and farmland for Option 1 and the use of the brownfield site meaning there was no loss of habitats for Option 2.

(d)   Many candidates failed to achieve more than 1 mark on this question as they wrote about nimbyism or the airport again. The best answers usually went along the lines of loss of farmland, leading to loss of hedgerows and so loss of habitat for Option 1. Lack of resources, meaning more cars on local roads to reach services, causing traffic congestion for Option 2.

B561/02 Sustainable Decision Making (Higher Tier)

General Comments

There was evidence of good preparation for the examination and candidates of all abilities were able to access the resources. The rubric was followed with few errors. The full range of marks was seen and there were few instances where candidates made no attempt to answer a question. The majority of candidates completed the paper. Most of the candidates responded to all the bullet points in question 5. Many candidates were able to include their own research and gain credit in their answers particularly in questions 3 and 4b. Candidates do need to be reminded that developing one or two ideas will gain more credit than stating a range of ideas on level response questions such as question 5.

The standard of written work was good overall and acceptable for the weaker candidates. Candidates need to be encouraged to use paragraphs in their answers. Most candidates showed a good understanding of the subject matter and were able to use the appropriate geographical terminology, such as sustainability, with understanding. Examples of this were seen in questions and 3, 4b and 5. However, too many candidates continue to make reference to pollution without specifying which type they are referring to. Candidates need to be reminded of the need to read the wording of the questions carefully so they understand their demands. This was particularly so for question 4b which required a balanced argument to achieve full marks. Candidates were able to interpret data from a graph and many used it to support their answers.

Comments on Individual Questions
Question 1 (a)

Most candidates scored 1 out of 2 marks as they gave two unrelated problems rather than developing one as the question demanded. The most commonly identified problems included 'overcrowding' and 'shortage of homes/jobs'. A number of candidates described the pattern and quoted dates and figures from resource 1b so gained no credit.

Question 1 (b)

Most candidates scored 1 out of 2 marks as they gave unrelated problems rather than developing one as the question demanded. The most commonly identified problems were 'empty houses' or 'shops/services closing down'. A number of candidates identified trends on resource 1b or gave reasons as to why there is rural to urban migration and so gained no credit.

Question 2

Candidates were able to describe the pattern shown on the graph in Resource 2, often quoting percentage figures, and gave sound reason(s) for each of the age groups. However, the answers often lacked development of their ideas which was needed to access level 3. There were a minority of candidates who were able to develop their ideas and were credited with 5 or 6 marks and mainly for the 45-64 year old age group. The most common responses at this level were 'worked for longer, more disposable income so could afford larger house in quiet rural area'. There was a perception amongst candidates that housing was cheaper in urban areas and more expensive in rural areas. In addition many candidates considered that all people in this age group were either retired or nearing retirement. Those candidates that listed ideas for each of the age groups were credited with 1 or 2 marks. The most common responses at this level were jobs/night life/universities in urban areas for the 16-29 year old age group and peace/quiet/less crime in rural areas for the 45-64 year old age group.

Question 3

Candidates needed to develop the ideas in resource 3 explaining the impact these would have on the amount of housing available. Candidates who, in their answer, merely rearranged the words from the resource were credited with 1 or 2 marks. Most candidates were able to access level 2 and were credited with 3 or 4 marks. Answers developing ideas such as 'increasing divorce rates, splitting households leading to families having two houses rather than one leaving less houses available for others' and 'people living longer because of better medical care meant they occupy their houses for a longer period of time and they are not released onto the market for others to buy' are examples credited at level 3. There were some good examples of candidates using their own knowledge to answer this question when they referred to the effects of the current economic recession on housing shortage.

Question4 (a)

Most candidates scored 2/2 for this question. A minority of candidates were credited with their own ideas such as 'insulation' and 'triple glazing'.

Question 4 (b)

The best answers to this question were characterised by applying the theory to their own example of an urban area. Some very good answers were seen particularly in relation to 'the public transport system in London, congestion charges and Boris Bikes leading to reduction in car usage and less carbon emissions'. Transport and employment were the most popular choices to explain sustainability or otherwise. The candidates who failed to score took ideas from Resource 4 and tried to show what needed to be included in a settlement to make it sustainable yet the focus of the question was existing settlements. Others who referred to existing settlements that had been built in a sustainable way such as Greenwich Millennium Village were given appropriate credit.

Question 5

Many candidates did cover the bullet points in their answer so ensuring that they covered all parts of the question. Option 1 was the most popular followed by option 2 with fewer choosing option 3. In their answers some candidates confused the terms 'greenfield' and 'green belt'. Some candidates used the resources effectively and were credited at high levels. Those candidates at level 2 tended to use the resources to outline their ideas rather than developing them further. Many candidates credited at level 3 were able to explain why their chosen option was sustainable with the most common developed idea relating to 'integrated transport/cycle paths/proximity to services, means less reliance on cars and less carbon emissions' and '14,000 proposed new jobs mean lower unemployment/ more people earning/spending in local services boosting local economy'. Too few candidates were able to develop contrasting views from two different groups of local people. In many instances groups of people were not identified beyond 'one group would think this and one group would think that' and candidates did not always look at contrasting viewpoints rather just two views for or two views against their chosen option. Ideas were often only developed for those opposed to their choice for example 'members of the Flying Club would not be happy about having to move from their site as they may have further to travel costing them more for fuel'. In many instances there was either limited mention made, or none at all, for those in favour. For example for a local viewpoint for options 1 and 2 many wrote 'residents in Little Stretton would benefit from the proximity of new services'. There were obvious misconceptions as to the scale of the airfield which meant that some stakeholder views lacked credibility. Option 3 saw some good answers from candidates who made reference to ideas of refurbishing derelict properties and building on brownfield sites in Leicester as a sustainable method of providing new homes. There were some candidates who, choosing option 3 found it difficult to support their choice and usually attempted to do so by explaining the weaknesses of the other two options. Some candidates gave advantages and disadvantages of a rejected option when only the latter was asked for. This section of the answer was often the shortest and least developed.

B562 Geographical Enquiry

Administration by centres has improved with most centres completing assessment grids fully with candidate numbers. They are also securing both assessment units together. The majority of centres are annotating the assessment grids and candidates work and this allows moderators to see where credit has been allocated for the objectives. One centre selected incorrect titles for the geographical investigation element of the controlled assessment.

The enquiry involves centres selecting one fieldwork focus title from four and a choice of 18 titles for the geographical investigation. The fieldwork focus titles were all selected but the majority were rivers and coasts. Most centres split the title into several appropriate key questions and this provided a focus for primary data collection, analysis, evaluation and making substantiated conclusions. Most centres selected one title for their candidates to research in the geographical investigation. The favourites were vandalism, cholera, world heritage sites and energy conservation. There were some centres who allowed a free choice or one from four titles. The vast majority of candidates chose to write a research report, only a few chose power-point presentations, booklet/poster or even an oral interview. Some centres provided some sources for their candidates, the vast majority allowed candidates access to the internet for their research which was recorded in a diary. The vast majority of centres used ICT extensively in both their fieldwork and reports for research and presentation of their work.

The standard of marking was much better this year as one would expect centres to have responded to the reports provided by moderators previously. It was obvious that the majority of centres had attended INSET and fully understood the requirements of controlled assessment. The fieldwork focus on the whole was marked closely to the assessment criteria. Centres that did not were those that did not; split the title into key questions, provide a methodology table, collect sufficient primary data or present it in a variety of graphs. This year the majority provided maps to locate the study area at various scales. They also justified their key questions and stated what their expectations were. There were still some instances of poor sketching and labelling rather than annotating. They also had candidates analysing their findings in a superficial manner and not giving any reasoning. There were some excellent examples of candidates who had combined maps, photographs, graphs and their analysis on one page. They also made substantiated conclusions and realistic evaluations. Some however, did have some over use of tables and text boxes to try and reduce the word count.

The geographical investigation was marked more closely to the assessment criteria than in June 2012. The majority of centres did encourage their candidates to write a thought shower to help them identify key questions and give their report a logical structure. It is encouraging to see more centres insisting on a research diary and the best had candidates acknowledging sources and evaluating their validity. They also acknowledged images directly and linked them to their bibliography. Some candidates however had no images, maps, quotes or graphs making it look and read like an essay not a research report. Some also failed to acknowledge their sources and made no mention of stakeholders. However, the vast majority provided tables or speech bubbles to show stakeholders views. High level investigations made substantiated conclusions, looked to the future where appropriate and showed extensive research of sources.

In both assessments one common problem was the word count which in some centres was exceeded significantly. This meant that work lacked focus, precision and succinctness and centres need to ensure that candidates are aware of this failing. Centres also need to recognise this in their mark allocation.

Overall there was an improvement in the quality of the work produced and it was very encouraging to see candidates enthusiastically take the opportunities offered, especially in the geographical investigation where candidates had selected the titles. They showed initiative, imagination and independence at a high level. Once again it was also encouraging to moderate complete pieces of work, even from weaker candidates, where they had attempted all elements of the assessment. I am confident that centres and candidates will become more familiar with controlled assessment and that moderator reports and inset have helped guide centres to improve.

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