

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

International GCSE
Geography 4GE0_01

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General Comments

This two and three-quarter hour paper of three sections was the last of a run of three examinations starting in 2011 which catered for a substantial entry from both home and overseas centres and assessed specified fieldwork tasks as an item within long structured topic questions. 2014 will see a change in the style of the paper. Fieldwork will be assessed as discrete structured questions in a fourth section of a three hour paper.

This 2013 examination saw the entry of both home and overseas candidates grow yet again but a drop in the mean mark and a corresponding small fall in the proportion of A*/A-C grades compared to the two previous examinations. The spread of marks was in line with that of the two previous examinations.

The general improvement in performance on fieldwork items, especially 1c, 2c and 3c noted in the 2012 report was maintained this year. This bodes well for the 2014 examination with its greater emphasis on fieldwork. The 2012 report also highlighted the scope that remains for improving the answering of finale items (part (d)) where a named case study as per the specification is sought. Case study choice in this examination was not always at its best; see the question-specific comments as they relate 1d and 9d.

Candidates should be encouraged to offer more specific detail applicable to their named study and to focus more precisely on meeting the demands of the command words of the question i.e. explain how or explain why. NAQ (not answering the question) was a marked issue in this year's examination. The question-specific comments that follow note the many items where candidates generally either misread or misinterpreted the question set and "lost" marks because they failed to address the thrust of the question. Teachers are advised to devote more time and effort to answering technique so that candidates better meet the full demands of questions in the 2014 examination. The introduction of the command word, discuss to this examination with the new version of the specification and the 2014 and beyond examination in mind did raise some challenges for candidates. Prior to the 2014 examination teachers are advised to make candidates fully aware of the demands of this command word. Furthermore, some candidates "lost" a mark in items (c)(i) of questions 4-6 because of inaccurate data plotting. Bars should be plotted with straight edges and shaded appropriately. Pie charts should be marked up and labelled in line with normal conventions.

It was pleasing to report that despite a further rise in the candidature the number of candidates exceeding the allotted answering space did not rise beyond the 2012 amount. This still remains a significant amount and teachers are advised to emphasise to their students that clear, concise responses can and do achieve maximum marks. The manner in which candidates handle question choice and avoid rubric offences suggests that advice and examination preparation points are followed carefully by candidates.

Question-specific Comments

Section A : The Natural Environment and People

Question 1 – River environments

Again this year the rivers question proved to be the second most popular option with candidates in this opening section of the paper. It was generally attempted fairly well with most candidates scoring 4 or 5 marks in part (a). Part (b) addressing upland valley features provided more differentiation. Most correctly identified one of the features in Figure 1b, usually interlocking spurs with some picking up both marks. There were some good answers to (b)(ii) but many candidates failed to go beyond vertical erosion by the river which most did, and recognise slope development and the valley formation process needed for full marks. (b)(iii) was really well answered with many high marks because candidates often offered well annotated waterfall diagrams which not only identified key features but also explained the formation process. The practical fieldwork opportunity item ((c)) varied in quality though there was ample evidence to suggest personal practical experience. Most candidates could define and describe water depth but some struggled with channel cross-sectional area. Discharge and velocity measurements were nearly as frequent as channel width measurement. Risk assessments and technique evaluation were generally absent from the responses but clear diagrams enhanced the quality of many answers. The better answers were of an excellent standard. The finale item ((d)) was not particularly well answered by many candidates, largely because they failed to answer the question of how flooding was controlled. Level 3 responses required attention to the mechanism and location of the control methods. Most named a scheme but that choice was crucial in answering the question. The Mississippi, the Bangladeshi Flood Action Plan and many smaller locally-based case studies generated the better responses. Answering flood defence scheme questions using a dam case study e.g. The Three Gorges is a challenging option for candidates, especially when they get drawn into the advantages and disadvantages of the dam project.

Question 2 – Coastal environments

This was the least popular of the Section A questions as in 2012 though as in the previous examination it did have a substantial take-up. The vast majority of candidates scored highly in part (a) though not all candidates appreciated that (a)(iii) was specifically about the adoption of managed retreat rather than a general question on coastal defence. Part (b) provided greater differentiation as it did in question 1, especially (ii) and (iii). The vast majority did score in (i) though Figure 2b did confuse some. There was also confusion in (ii) between the formation of cliffs and of headlands and bays. This item was generally not well done; many did not fully understand the interaction of geology and process in cliff face construction. Item (b)(iii) produced better candidate outcomes with most successfully identifying valid conflicts of interest though those who focussed their response to the actual coastline shown in Figure 2b had the greatest difficulty. As in question 1, many candidates showed that they had visited a beach and undertaken an investigation of how sediment characteristics changed along or up the beach. There were those who clearly had not been involved in practical fieldwork and for whom descriptions of beach profiling and the use of a quadrat were not familiar. The final 9-mark item tended to split candidates into high scores and low scores. The better answers were able to draw out broad locational factors from one or more case studies e.g. coral reefs, mangrove stands ... that they had studied. Their explanations were often strong on physical factors with human factors proving a little more challenging. Weaker answers often focussed on human threats and ecosystem damage, and generally lacked locational detail.

Question 3 : Hazardous environments

This was the most popular question in Section A as in the previous examination and saw candidates scoring in the short answer questions in part (a). Responses were also generally good in part (b) though some candidates did confuse:

- earthquake-proof building design with more strategic earthquake damage mitigation techniques in (i)
-
- short-term and long-term impacts. The immediate effects such as rubble clearance and food supply were not always distinguished from the issues to do with re-building and recovery in (iii).

Nevertheless, many candidates did recognise the building design focus in (b)(i) and were able to make suitable suggestions. Equally, they identified valid long-term hazard impacts, usually related to earthquakes in (b)(iii). In both of these items, answers would have benefitted from more explanation and development of points.

The fieldwork item in this question proved far more challenging for candidates than did those in questions 1 and 2. The fact that this specified fieldwork opportunity is more practically difficult to conduct in local fieldwork was reflected the quality of the responses. Candidates tended to describe either questionnaire design, especially the questions they would ask or the method of survey e.g. sampling. Few covered both or any justification for the design or the method of completion.

There was also too little focus in the questionnaire design aspect on hazard management but rather on hazard effects. The 9-mark finale item was generally well answered though there was the full range of levels of response as per the mark scheme. The best answers were excellent and included well annotated diagrams and detailed explanations of both relevant types of plate boundary as well as reference to hot spots. This item tended to be one of the higher scoring finales even where reference was to only one plate boundary type or lacked diagrams or described rather than fully explained.

Section B : People and their Environments

Question 4: Economic activity and energy

This was a popular choice of question with almost all candidates gaining maximum marks in part (a). Item (b)(i) was also in general, particularly well answered. Many candidates secured Levels 2 and 3 marks by referring to access to transport, proximity to labour force and urban areas, room for expansion and environmental attraction as factors directly relevant to car production. (b)(ii) discriminated effectively for a 2-mark definition with not all recognising the micro-electronics and R & D basis of high-tech industry. The part (c) fieldwork-style tasks generated very positive scoring with many candidates getting into Level 2 and beyond. Reference has been made to graph-completion tasks in the opening general comments. The vast majority did complete the graph by plotting the two missing bars and were able to draw some conclusions from the data, principally based on observations concerning prevailing wind direction and spatial distance. Better responses saw the significance of the area of high land and sought to link the three factors into a developed explanation for the views expressed in the three settlements. There were some excellent responses to the 9-mark discuss item that closed this question. These offered locational detail, renewable energy project case studies and thorough knowledge of the pros and cons of non-renewable sources. Most candidates were at least able to write in general terms about the visual pollution, locational limitations, sustainability and cost implications of renewable in a reasonably balanced manner to reach (or nearly so) Level 2 marks.

Question 5 : Ecosystems and rural environments

This was by far the least popular question in this section as has been the pattern of previous examinations. Candidates tended to start well with most candidates having little difficulty in gaining all or most of the 5 marks available in part (a). Part (b) received a more mixed reception with (i) proving quite challenging and not high scoring while (ii) scored well. Most candidates recognised the attempts to raise agricultural production as straightforward but often gaining only one of the two development marks by repeating increased yield. The prohibitive cost of food imports and the extreme nature of tropical weather tended to be the focus of most responses to (b)(i). Few were able to offer a developed argument with the typical answer amounting to isolated points. The fieldwork-style part (c) was generally the best answered item in this question. Most candidates completed the pie-chart and gained some credit in (i) and reached some quite sound conclusions about changes in land use and the new reliance on alternative revenue streams, including the increase in tourist income in (ii).

Answers would generally have been improved had some reference been made to the reasons that lie behind these changes. Item (d) on a temperate grassland biome case study was often the weakest finale item answer on the paper. Generally, a valid area, usually the Prairies was named but there was limited understanding of its physical and ecological characteristics, especially their interrelationships. Some of the material offered was irrelevant as a characteristic. There were a few decent responses on the area's agricultural use, including arable farming and the degree of cultivation.

Question 6 : Urban environments

This was again the most popular option in Section B and generally assessed aspects of urban geography with which candidates were familiar. Part (a) was mostly answered very well with almost all gaining all or most of the five marks available. Part (b) on the significance and development of shanty towns were also generally well answered as well as introducing a degree of discrimination into the marking. Item (b)(ii) set the more conventional task with its request for self-help schemes, micro-lending, introduction of utilities etc.. These were frequently offered along with named examples by many candidates; they received in general good reward. (b)(i) was slightly less straightforward and did not always elicit the correct response even though reference to affordable housing for rural to urban migrants was prolific. The fieldwork-style item (c) as with its counterparts in questions 4 and 5 did tend to score well.

Most candidates completed the scattergraph though not all got maximum marks and many candidates achieved Level 2 marks for their conclusions drawn from an analysis of the data in Figures 6c and 6d. More would have accessed Level 3 scores had they made use of the full range of variables in the data – location, EQ, land use and building height. The first two tended to dominate answers with many ignoring the height of buildings. Part (d) was often pleasingly well answered by the general standard of the 9-mark finale items. The intention and expectation of the question was that named urban area would equate with CBD, inner city, rural-urban edge ... Candidates frequently saw it as meaning Birmingham, Nairobi, Southampton ... and wrote about changes across their named city. There were some good case studies of the London Docklands, including Stratford which fitted in better with the question's original intention. On the whole, candidates received good credit for their answers.

Section C : Global Issues

Question 7 : Fragile environments

This question was clearly the most popular in this section. Candidates generally had little difficulty with the items in part (a) with the exception of (a)(iii) where the idea of “per person” was either missed or misunderstood by many candidates. Consequently, the item generated a range of marks from 0 to 2. Equally, there were full, accurate definitions of global warming in (b)(i) where the absence of average and/or recency in the responses was fairly common. Item (b)(ii) discriminated effectively with responses ranging from outcomes from various UN conferences, including Kyoto to general local/national actions outside the UN framework. The former were often very good the latter did not answer the question. (b)(iii) was frequently not well answered with few addressing why cooperation has been tricky or why the USA did not sign the Kyoto Protocol. Many did recognise that MICs are industrialising and polluting as did HICs in the past, that both MICs and HICs use a lot of fossil fuels and that cutting emissions may hinder economic growth. Few developed a detailed explanation. Most candidates identified Africa in item (c) though some went on to explain the causes and process of desertification as opposed to the consequences requested. There were some good located accounts often Sahelian in which human impacts such as crop failure, mass starvation and rural to urban migration were discussed. The 9-mark finale item discriminated well. For a discuss task, too few offered any positive consequences preferring to focus on the detrimental effects on the environment. There were also responses that dealt with the causes of deforestation (but failed to see them as positive consequences for the economy of say, Brazil) and the consequences of desertification (by failing to note the switch from desertification after item (c)). The best answers concentrated on biodiversity, leaching, carbon sinks and conflict between local tribes and outsiders. On the whole, this question scored less well than question 7s in previous examinations.

Question 8 : Globalisation and migration.

This question was less popular than question 7 but a little more so than question 9. Part (a) proved not to be the most rewarding part (a) on the paper as candidates often failed to identify the permanent/semi-permanent nature of migration in (ii) and a valid second reason for immigration to Australia for Asians and New Zealanders in (iii). Part (b) items were often better answered with the concept of net migration in (i) and forced migration push factors in (ii) were generally familiar to the candidates. There was a tendency, however, for repetition of the explanation as to the working of the basic push factor e.g. conflict, persecution .. Item (b)(iii) was also generally well answered with many candidates offering valid reasons as to why governments would want to manage migration, usually immigration with job scarcity, overcrowding and criminal activity figuring large in the answers. Immigration was often addressed sensitively with some overlap between the two reasons suggested. Item (c) differentiated very well with weaker responses offering only social and environmental negative impacts (e.g. littering, culture clashes ...) and the very best answers dealing with both positive and negative effects in an economic as well as social and environmental sense (e.g. local people opening bars; profits in TNC-owned hotels not benefitting local population ...). Item (d) proved to be a challenging item with candidates generally being comfortable with the operations, advantages and disadvantages of TNCs, knowing about the interdependence of the global economy but having some difficulty in relating the two in a way which explained a changing global economy. The choice of a named TNC was also crucial; Tesco was not the best choice from which to discuss supply chains, spatial division of labour and least cost location decisions.

Question 9 : Development and human welfare

This question was the least popular one in this section. Part (a) scored very well with many gaining 4 or 5 marks. The development profile (Figure 9a) was well understood and almost all candidates knew that GDP and quality of life measured different things. The concept of a development gap was generally well known though too many used the words, global, development and gap in their answers to gain maximum marks. Item (b)(ii) was generally well answered with almost all candidates being able to offer at least one statement identifying a narrowing gap with the rise of China/India and MICs developing faster than HICs being the most common. (b)(iii) was reasonably well answered though not quite as well as (ii). There was a general recognition that the development process is gradual and takes time; many also wrote about rich elites, poor majorities, population size, regional disparities and health/education quality. Figure 9b acted as a useful prompt for item (c) with candidates referring to overcrowding, unemployment and quality of life though too few brought located examples or case study material to their answer.

The 9-mark finale item was reasonably well answered in the main though responses frequently did not focus sufficiently on advantages and disadvantages in the opinion of the candidate. Some of the offerings were too generic, too historic, too aid agency descriptive and too focussed on the types of aid and on disadvantages. The better candidates did discuss debt relief, corruption and appropriate aid with a balance of pros and cons and in context of often Oxfam or World Bank activities. The item was a decent differentiator.

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