AQA

GCSE
GEOGRAPHY

Paper 2 Challenges in the human environment
Report on the Examination

8035
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General Comments

This report covers responses from Paper 2 GCSE Geography in 2018, the first year of this examination.

This was a 1 hour 30 minute paper with 88 marks available and with a variety of question types: multiple choice, cloze exercises, short structured questions and longer extended prose answers. Questions were set both with and without stimulus material. The questions required candidates to use and apply a range of skills, including the interpretation of photographs, graphs, maps, diagrams and charts.

There was evidence of good preparation for the examination and students of all abilities were able to access the resources with good use being made of them for all of the questions. The rubric was followed with few errors. The full range of marks was seen. There were few instances where students failed to answer a question.

As the first year of a non-tiered paper, it proved to be accessible to students of all abilities as all questions elicited answers from students across the ability range. It also effectively discriminated between students of varying ability. There were basic answers showing some geographical knowledge and understanding at one end of the spectrum and outstanding thorough responses at the other end. Schools should be commended on the way they have encouraged all students to engage with the paper and on the amount and variety of content they have clearly taught.

As this is the first year of the examination there are a number of general lessons to be taken which will no doubt improve performance as the specification content and questions formats become more familiar.

- Schools and students need to ensure that they are prepared for those types of questions such as 01.5 and 01.7 which require them to show understanding (AO2) and then apply this (AO3). Simply repeating case study information is knowledge (AO1) and cannot gain credit in this style of question.
- Schools and students should remember that 10% of the marks come from mathematical skills and therefore they should be able to perform these accurately.
- Where a source is provided, students are expected to make use of it, particularly where the command is "Using figure… and your own understanding". Despite the challenges of a new specification these fundamental skills (AO4) of extracting information from sources remain valid.
- Gaps in terminology and coverage are to be avoided. Students cannot access all the marks unless their knowledge of terms and concepts is secure.
- Higher scoring students knew, and were able to respond to, the command words. The key feature that indicated that students were operating in the higher levels was their ability to organise information to the specific demands of the question set.

Section A Urban issues and challenges

This question produced slightly more confident answers than seen in Section B from the majority of students, possibly because the content was the most familiar to teachers from previous specifications. The amount of case study detail known by students was impressive at times and when combined with a focus on the question yielded some outstanding answers. Students made varying use of the stimulus and source materials but showed an encouraging willingness to attempt the questions regardless of their ability.

01.1 Almost universally correct. This question and the next proved a good opportunity for candidates to gain early credit.

01.2 This proved not as straightforward as might have been expected with many students not gaining all 3 marks, though most gained some. 'Slow down' and 'doubled' were the answers that were most often incorrect. Schools could usefully practice these skills of accuracy to help reduce such errors.

01.3 The pie chart was more confidently handled than the line graph, with students mostly scoring well. Credit was usually given for 2 separate points with a focus on the pattern and the balance between the factors. Where students failed to score it was usually because they listed or drifted into explanation.

01.4 Very few students gained nothing for this question with many gaining 2 marks for developing their point.

01.5 Along with the previous question, students responded well to the inclusion of different stimulus material in the form of twitter comments and used these well as starting points for their answers. Choice of case study was varied and generally appropriate, sometimes determining the scope of the answer e.g. the physical site problems of Rio de Janeiro. Many answers remained generic and therefore at Level 2 for generalised discussion of population growth and vehicle numbers. The best answers were aware that the two problems can be linked both to each other and to rapid economic development, using the case study to scaffold their answer.

01.6 Almost always a correct mathematical calculation of range but as the graph was not always read correctly this did not result in the correct answer. A simple but carelessly executed skill cost some students a mark.

01.7 The question was frequently adequately answered, but rarely well answered. Many students gained credit for basic inequalities in urban areas and a tentative link to GCSE scores, but few managed this to the top of Level 2. Many considered wealth and access to tutoring and private education. There were some false assumptions that suburban schools were less crowded and in order to widen the access to marks a broad view was taken of this idea if it was linked to issues such as class sizes and subsequent outcomes. Less able students referred to urban/rural differences and even to the North/South divide. The question discriminated well between those who had real understanding and those without. Students should be encouraged to look more carefully at figures and to apply knowledge, in this case of inequalities, to an unfamiliar resource.

01.8 There were few correct answers here as very many referred to international migration. Some gained credit for generic answers with few understanding the concept of character. Only a handful used identifiably national migration e.g. student led growth in cities such as Manchester.

01.9 A named city was almost always present. Clearly many schools had prepared students for these new command words with some good awareness shown of the need to address the 'to what extent' aspect of the question. Weaker answers tended to be generic and offer 'anytown' geography without details or even clarity of urban change in the city studied. There was also drift into social and/or economic problems at the lower end of the mark range. Many students accessed Level 2 with either general assessment or good case study knowledge, showing the range of ways by which marks can be gained in these longer questions. Only the best answers were able to connect place knowledge with evaluative assessment. The outcome was that the question provided an effective discriminator across the ability range.

Section B The changing economic world

Answers here displayed less confidence from many, notably in the latter UK focussed questions. This reflects likely lack of experience with the content and style of the questions and it is hoped that this will improve in future series. As in section A the range of knowledge was remarkable from the best students. Whilst there were a few more unanswered questions than in Section A, the majority remained willing to interpret the question and attempt to answer it and showed some sound geographical understanding in the process.

02.1 Answers were mostly correct, at least for the working and usually for both marks. The source of errors generally lay in confusing median with mean.

02.2 Very few scored because they failed to use the figure despite the question stating 'shown in figure 5'. There is clearly a skills issue here for schools and students which could be easily addressed.

02.3 This was generally well answered with students of all abilities understanding the idea of an average and / or that economics are but one aspect of development.

02.4 The majority of students accessed at least some marks, frequently to the top of Level 1, using the figure as a prompt. Many also used their own studies to exemplify the points. A much smaller number were able to link the figure and/or their own information to how the development gap was reduced either by government spending or economic growth fostered by tourism. Schools could usefully prepare students to recognise 'own understanding' as being as much about geography and explanation of process as factual examples.

02.5 It was surprising how many didn't access the marks despite the information provided. Usually this was because assumptions were made about things not evident in the figure. Most, however, gained at least one mark.

02.6 The term 'intermediate technology' was either known or not and provided a simple mark for those familiar with it. Some simply provided the example from figure 7 which was not creditworthy.

02.7 Responses here were varied from the vague and un-creditworthy to good specific examples that had been well learnt.

02.8 Most common by far here was Nigeria and Shell, but India/Unilever and China/Apple also featured. All were perfectly acceptable. The knowledge (AO1) elements were well addressed with clear learnt case studies. Many students could then offer a basic or implicit link to development and gain Level 2 marks. Only the best answers made a more explicit link (AO2) to industrial development, and therefore marks in Level 3. Generally students addressed the wording of the question well.

02.9 Most students could calculate this correctly and gained the working mark. Some then self-penalised through then rounding the figure incorrectly and lost the second mark. A wide range of answers were acceptable as the question did not specify the number of decimal points. However, marks could not be given for mathematically incorrect operations.

02.10 Both the overall marks and the knowledge displayed for AO1 were lower quality here than on 02.8 or the 9 mark question in section A. Some was very generic such as 'more/better roads'. Less able students also only saw this as public transport and wrote very generally about that. Students who knew specific transport improvements tended to perform better with Crossrail, HS2, smart motorways and the Heathrow third runway the common choices. These were then linked to the question with varying success.

The command 'assess' was less well tackled than 'to what extent'. Students should be encouraged to learn facts rather than creating their own. Some of the descriptions of the scale of economic benefit or of reduction in travelling time from HS2 or smart motorways were not credible geography. A common error was to relate improvements to the environment and not the economy. A small but significant number of students showed real insight into this question. The potential impacts of HS2 and the negative impacts of spending so much on transport were well addressed in some excellent answers.

Section C The challenge of resource management

The answers in the first section were somewhat variable with a sense that some students were unfamiliar with some of the content examined.

03.1 Most gained a straightforward mark here.

03.2 This was poorly answered overall. Many students didn't seem to understand the concept of well-being and this clearly limited the marks awarded. Equally many didn't follow the instruction to 'use figure 9'. As elsewhere in the paper, attention to these command words will be a means by which schools can improve performance.

03.3 If the students understood the term they gained both marks. Most did not, despite it being in the specification, and either gained zero or left this blank. There is much to be said for learning terminology.

03.4 More able candidates had no problem with this question and scored well. Less successful answers simply described changes evident in the graph which did not gain any credit and did not link these to the issues raised. Misunderstanding was also evident with fracking frequently conflated with gas and many believing it was widespread in the UK.

Question 4 Food

This was the second most popular option after Water. In common with the other two options, the best students displayed considerable knowledge and understanding in terms of both case studies / examples and concepts and processes.

04.1 Almost universally correct.

04.2 The multiple choice question was mostly correct, as was the calculation below. Where errors were made it was either due to not rounding correctly or to 1 decimal point or not knowing how to calculate a percentage. This was the most frequently incorrect of the mathematical skills assessed.

04.3 Most were able to identify at least one feature of the distribution to gain credit. Two marks were frequently gained for 2 separate statements. Students should avoid non-geographical language such as 'by the edge' and should be encouraged to use their compass points as some didn't seem to know them.

04.4 Again often one mark with fewer gaining the second for the developed point. A wide range of valid reasons were offered and credited.

04.5 Unfortunately some students wrote very detailed answers based around large scale schemes which were restricted to Level 1 for their lack of sustainability. Exceptions were made to this for examples such as Thanet Earth where the students could demonstrate sustainability in the operation. The schemes listed in the specification only made rare appearances with a great deal of confusion over what constitutes sustainability. Rarely was there a link effectively made to sustainability, making high Level 2 or Level 3 answers unusual.

Question 5 Water

This was the most frequently answered of the three options. In common with the other two options, the best students displayed considerable knowledge and understanding in terms of both case studies/examples and concepts and processes.

05.1 Almost universally correct.

05.2 The multiple choice question was mostly correct, as was the calculation below. Where errors were made it was either due to not rounding correctly or to 1dp or not knowing how to calculate a percentage. This was the most frequently incorrect of the mathematical skills assessed.

05.3 Most were able to identify at least one feature of the distribution to gain credit. Two marks were frequently gained for 2 separate statements. A frequent error was the statement 'most countries are in South Africa' rather than referring to the 'largest area'. Students should avoid non-geographical language such as 'by the edge' and should be encouraged to use their compass points as some didn't seem to know them.

05.4 This was variably understood. Successful answers were usually linked to climate but too many students saw being landlocked or distance to the sea as the issue affecting water supply.

05.5 As in equivalent questions there were some issues with the sustainability aspect and a focus on large scale dams or water transfer schemes. Specification examples such as grey water,

recycling and water conservation were more frequent here, along with excellent examples such as sand dams in LICs. Discrimination between students lay in their ability to connect these strategies to sustainability.

Question 6 Energy

This was the least frequently answered of the three options. In common with the other two options, the best students displayed considerable knowledge and understanding in terms of both case studies / examples and concepts and processes.

06.1 Almost universally correct.

06.2 The multiple choice question was mostly correct, as was the calculation below. Where errors were made it was either due to not rounding correctly or to 1dp or not knowing how to calculate a percentage. This was the most frequently incorrect of the mathematical skills assessed.

06.3 Most were able to identify at least one feature of the distribution to gain credit, though some seemed to find this pattern more difficult. Students should avoid non-geographical language such as 'by the edge' and should be encouraged to use their compass points as some didn't seem to know them.

06.4 Again often one mark with fewer gaining the second for the developed point. Low income was the main suggestion with some students aware of geological issues or political limitations.

06.5 As in equivalent questions there were some issues with the sustainability aspect. Many concentrated on renewable energy resources exclusively and were able to link them to sustainability at least in simple terms for Level 2 marks. Large scale or unsustainable schemes were rarer here, with some conservation and design strategies used to expand the range in an answer.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.