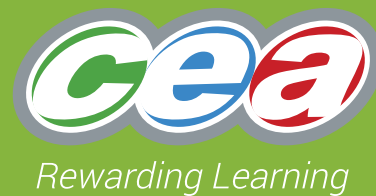


GCE



Chief Examiner's Report Geography

Summer Series 2023



Foreword

This booklet outlines the performance of candidates in all aspects of this specification for the Summer 2023 series.

CCEA hopes that the Chief Examiner's and/or Principal Moderator's report(s) will be viewed as a helpful and constructive medium to further support teachers and the learning process.

This booklet forms part of the suite of support materials for the specification. Further materials are available from the specification's microsite on our website at www.ccea.org.uk.

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GCE GEOGRAPHY

Chief Examiner's Report

Subject Overview

Presumably this will be the last set of AS geography examinations to be affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. This year, whilst candidates were obliged to sit the full set of three exams, matters were eased somewhat by the issue of Advance Information for each unit. Additionally, it was determined that the pattern of grades awarded would be more generous than those of the last pre-pandemic year of 2019, but fall below the pattern of teacher-determined grades. The Advance Information guided candidates and their teachers as to what topics were to be examined, although advice was given that the whole specification should be covered. One Principal Examiner noted that although the Advance Information did appear to support students in their responses, most notably in the extended answers in Section B, a differentiated outcome was evident overall. For AS2 in particular, it was felt that Advance Information had assisted some candidates in the preparation for the examination, with many being able to achieve Level 3 answers. However, the issue of Advance Information could not compensate for experience missed during Covid and this was a particular problem at AS3 for, as the Principal Examiner noted, the majority of candidates prior to the 2022-23 academic year had been able to gain little or no experience of geographical fieldwork and its assessment. Fieldwork in these 2023 examinations was sometimes poor, partly it must be assumed as a result of this lack of experience.

Many assistant examiners commented on the importance and value of the Resources in AS geography questions. Resources offer weaker students, who might bring little to the examination, material to work with. Indeed, some otherwise weak students scored most of their marks from manipulation of Resources. Resources provided a platform for these candidates to gain marks, particularly since many struggled to demonstrate knowledge and theoretical understanding of AS concepts: put bluntly by one examiner as 'a general lack of knowledge and learning of the basic geographical facts'. Better candidates, of course, could both manipulate the Resources and write good knowledge-based answers.

This year there seemed to be a plethora of learned essays which were triggered by the appearance of just the name of the key concept being examined without proper reference being made to the demands of the actual question. One experienced examiner put the matter cogently: 'candidates have to be reminded that there is a need to respond precisely and flexibly to the question set, an important determining factor for success.' Pre-prepared essay answers often lack focus on the question asked and consequently do not obtain high reward. As always, it needs to be stressed that candidates must read the questions, become aware of, and respond to, the command words, enabling them to present a focussed answer. Failure to respond adequately to the command word 'explain' caused problems this year. Lack of detail and a failure by some to use appropriate geographical terminology were other issues identified. Regarding the essay questions in AS1 and AS2, please note that they need not always be case studies and might be extended writing tasks incorporating any aspects of the course.

Teachers should share the examiner's reports with their students.

Unit Overview

The pre-release of Advance Information undoubtedly provided a novel experience for candidates when preparing for their AS1 examination, and thus it is interesting to compare the standard of performance with that evident in a normal summer series. In fact, this was broadly consistent with past examination series: marks ranged from the teens to the high 60s with an overall paper mean of 40 raw marks.

Assistant examiners reported that the command words used in the question paper provided no barriers to comprehension and there were ample opportunities for candidates to display their analytical, interpretative, and evaluative skills as well as demonstrate the depth of their geographical knowledge. It was pleasing to witness that many able candidates managed to progress confidently and competently throughout both sections of the paper, providing many impressive high-level responses, a recognisable indication of admirable preparation delivered by teachers. However, assistant examiners, as in previous examination series, identified a need for greater reinforcement of examination technique. This was manifest when candidates, who were clearly well prepared in terms of the theory aspect of the course, provided responses lacking in focus and relevancy perhaps through them not paying proper attention to command words and/or failing to read the question properly.

This report, which outlines a summary of student performance in individual questions, will also provide some constructive guidance to Centres to inform future examination preparation.

Assessment Unit AS 1 Physical Geography

- Q1 (a) (i)** The descriptive component of the question was reasonably well received, although the quality of the analytical commentary was frequently reduced by the lack of figures quoted, as well as a lack of descriptive terminology associated with the features of a hydrograph. Only the most able candidates appeared to confidently incorporate terms such as peak discharge, rising limb, recession limb etc. The majority of candidates focussed solely on snow melt as a causal factor for the hydrological regime in the drainage basin, with a widespread neglect of the gradient factor, which was clearly requested. It also appeared obvious that many candidates did not understand the term 'gradient', even though it is specifically highlighted as a factor requiring focus in the specification; thus, it was suggested by assistant examiners that this aspect of the specification may require greater reinforcement. Only more able candidates appeared confident in their use of hydrological terms such as infiltration, surface runoff etc. in their explanation, which enhanced the quality of their responses.
- (ii)** Although the specification requires candidates to explain basin shape as a factor influencing the hydrograph, a large proportion of candidates misunderstood this term and commonly confused basin shape with basin size or basin relief. Such answers were erroneous and consequently attainment was compromised. However, well-prepared candidates competently explained the flashy regime associated with a circular basin or alternatively the non-flashy response associated with an elongated basin.
- (b) (i)** This skills-based question was competently handled by almost all candidates. Many used the compass, the map scale and the isolines to describe accurately the retreat of Niagara Falls over time. Appropriate country references from the map also enabled candidates to score well.

- (ii) This question was well received, and candidates competently provided a sequential explanation of the stages associated with waterfall retreat. The inclusion of key terminology and recognition of waterfall characteristics and features was often impressive, which provides evidence that this landform is generally well understood. Candidates commonly recognised the importance of differential erosion rates associated with contrasting geological rock types and competently named the fluvial erosion processes associated with undercutting. However, only the most able managed to secure full marks by fully addressing the question and explaining these erosion processes. Therefore, it is vital that candidates read the question carefully to ensure that their answers are complete and fully focussed.
- Q2 (a) (i)** This straightforward question was well answered. Most candidates were able to competently calculate the energy loss from the trophic pyramid using the values provided. Others seemed to lack basic mathematical skills.
- (ii) Some impressive answers were produced with candidates explicitly using the Resource to explain energy fixation through photosynthesis, energy flow through successive trophic levels and energy loss. However, attainment was compromised when candidates failed to respond to all key elements of the question, with a significant number failing to effectively use the Resource or alternatively neglecting to explain the various ways in which autotrophs and heterotrophs lose energy.
- (b)** This question allowed well-prepared candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the role of decomposers within the nutrient cycling process as well as draw on their knowledge of their small-scale ecosystem case study. Breen Wood in County Antrim was most commonly selected for exemplification and marks were gained for the inclusion of relevant case study specifics. Many candidates, unfortunately, provided a theoretical answer with little more case study detail included other than location name. In situations where only very general details, rather than those specific to the case study were presented, full marks could not be awarded.
- (c)** This question, which required Resource interpretation as well as case study information, provided a high level of differentiation overall. Weaker candidates provided substantive descriptive engagement with the Resources and gained credit; however, attainment was compromised when candidates appeared insecure in their case study knowledge. Occasionally, candidates neglected to focus on the abiotic changes associated with climate change and produced irrelevant answers based on biotic changes. Well-prepared candidates excelled in this question. Many provided cogent, detailed answers which displayed an insightful breadth of knowledge on the impact of climate change in their selected regional scale tundra ecosystem case study. Many considered relevant climatic, hydrological, glacial, soil or atmospheric impacts, often with case study details and specialist terms. Positive or negative impacts were equally acceptable.

- Q3 (a)** This question proved to be surprisingly challenging, particularly for those who attempted to twist the question away from the desired focus. This question clearly required a description and explanation of wind only and unfortunately even well-prepared candidates frequently offloaded pre-prepared theoretical information on all structural elements of the hurricane or cited a myriad of formation factors. Many wasted precious examination time outlining rehearsed information on cloud patterns rather than focussing their attention on wind. More successful answers included reference to the Coriolis Force, the Pressure Gradient Force and occasionally the Centrifugal Force in their explanation of air flow patterns. Some of the most impressive answers charted the air flow patterns within the eye of the storm as well as the outer sectors including the eyewall. Weaker candidates, once again, benefited from the analysis of the Resource as it supported their description of the air flow pattern with the passage of Zeta, even though the explanatory component of the question was largely neglected.
- (b) (i)** This straightforward skills-based question was competently handled by almost all candidates.
- (ii)** This question gave candidates of all abilities the opportunity to analyse data and display their understanding of the typical meteorological changes associated with the passage of the cold front of a mid-latitude depression. Weaker candidates often gained Level 2 marks as they engaged positively with the Resources and provided creditworthy description, depicting trends, and quoting supporting figures for a range of variables, even though they struggled with the explanatory component of the question. Although candidates generally displayed competent analytical skills, the explanatory component was often more problematic and unbalanced answers were surprisingly common. Although some simplistic reasoning was occasionally offered, only the more able candidates provided an accurate, detailed, and factual explanation of the forecasted weather patterns. These candidates appeared to relish the opportunity to display their theoretical knowledge of the weather changes associated with the passage of the cold front and impressively included a wide range of specialist terminology. Such answers made essential reference to associated air masses, as well as an explanation of the formation of frontal rainfall, strong winds and heavy cloud cover.
- Q4** This question was fairly popular and well-prepared candidates, who responded to all aspects of the question, grasped the opportunity to secure high level marks. Differentiation, however, was clearly evident and was commonly related to the depth of evaluation provided for the three specified soft engineering river management methods. Although afforestation and washlands were generally well understood, many candidates misunderstood the landuse zoning strategy. Many did not seem to recognise that this method involved the spatial organisation of landuse categories (including infrastructure) across the floodplain, associated with differential levels of projected flood risk. Candidates commonly felt that this management method simply meant that the floodplain remained completely undeveloped. Therefore, this aspect of the course may require further reinforcement to aid more sophisticated understanding.

Examiners were prepared to accept a wide range of evaluative comments and rewarded relevant positive and negative reflections of these soft engineering methods in relation to sustainability. Although some simplistic evaluation was evident, more insightful reviews involved consideration of the social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainability.

Although the inclusion of place is a specific requirement of the specification, this aspect of the answer was fairly disappointing overall. Many candidates appeared to be completely unprepared for this aspect of the question and struggled to provide specific convincing illustrative place examples. Many places such as the River Mississippi or the River Yangtze were cited but their generalised scale failed to impress assistant examiners.

- Q5** This question proved to be both popular and accessible. Well prepared candidates, secure in their knowledge of ecological succession and factors causing seral change, excelled. As in previous examination series, psammosere studies dominated with occasional evidence of lithosere and hydrosere case studies. Well prepared candidates confidently classified and described all seral stages and explained relevant microclimatic and soil modification factors which caused the transition of their selected vegetation communities. Weaker candidates tended to provide a more generalised description of seral communities with little explanatory content.

Many centres successfully complete their fieldwork by conducting an investigation of vegetation succession, enabling candidates to integrate effectively relevant ecological data to aid description. Thus, many good answers included impressive locational depth as well as detailed and insightful theoretical understanding. Weaker candidates relied on the depiction of generalised ecological trends with fewer case study specifics and less impressive specialist terminology.

As in previous examination series, a minority of candidates incorrectly selected their small scale ecosystem case study and attained only low level marks for their description of the climatic climax stage of their succession study. These answers failed to demonstrate knowledge of earlier seral stages and associated successional processes.

A small number of centres appeared to select historical succession studies. Although definite seral stages were classified and some successional processes were understood, such studies failed to achieve top level marks due to their lack of precise case study detail. Only a generalised time scale supported their historical account.

- Q6** Although this initially appeared to be a very straightforward question with the four specified factors influencing temperature clearly listed on the specification and the theme clearly identified in the Advance Information, many candidates failed to provide sufficient detail in their explanations. Differentiation in this question was undoubtedly related to the candidate's theoretical knowledge of relevant meteorological concepts as well as the specialist terminology employed in responses.

Most candidates accurately quoted the lapse rate and displayed an awareness of temperature decrease with altitude. However, only well-prepared candidates successfully explained heat retention in the atmosphere in relation to the contrasting altitudinal air pressure differences. Although most candidates recognised the temperature contrast patterns between low and high latitudes, only the most able candidates could competently explain how the curvature of the earth caused disparities in the amount of insolation received. In relation to continentality, trends were well understood and both summer and winter contrasts were explicitly stated. However, the quality and depth of explanation provided allowed for differentiation. Weaker candidates often struggled to incorporate key terminology and provided only simplistic explanation, if any.

Seasonality was the factor which was dealt with least satisfactorily and frequently it was omitted. Only a small minority of well-prepared candidates recognised the importance of the tilt of the earth on its axis in its annual rotation around the sun. Few could explain seasonality in relation to the solstices and confidently

explain the thermal contrasts using appropriate AS level terminology. As this factor proved challenging for many respondents, it is possibly one which requires greater reinforcement within centres.

In terms of place exemplification, assistant examiners voiced their disappointment. Some candidates commonly neglected this aspect of the question while others provided only generalised simplistic place exemplification, with few temperature values provided to exemplify contrasts within the context of the question.

Assessment Unit AS 2 Human Geography

Unit Overview

The mean for this paper was 46.1 which is comparable to previous years. It is evident that the candidates are becoming more prepared for questions examining this specification with the increasing number of past papers and mark schemes available. The quality of detail in case study answers has seen significant improvements. As with past years, timing appears to be an issue. Candidates need to work through Section A promptly to leave time to complete two essays. A small number are still not doing this.

- Q1 (a) (i)** Overall this was a well-answered question. However, a significant number of candidates deviated from the names of the types of population policy. Too many answered by describing the 'nature of the policy', for example "two-child policy." Accurate geographical terminology needs to be taught from the specification.
- (ii)** This question was generally well answered, with a lot of candidates accessing good marks. A majority were able to explain the reasons why countries like Singapore needed such a fertility policy. When marks were lost it was mostly due to one of two reasons, firstly the lack of Resource use. A significant number answered this question by discussing their case study. This limited their marks as the question states 'with reference to the Resource'. Candidates must be guided on the importance of incorporating resources into their answers when asked to do so. Others lost marks by failing to discuss the success of the policy by using the data in Resource 1B, showing the decreased numbers in the younger age groups. Reading and identifying all parts of the question is a skill that needs to be emphasized.
- (iii)** This was the most poorly answered part of Question 1. The diagram was often particularly weak; candidates had clearly not spent time on this aspect of describing Malthusian theory, despite this task being on a previous paper. Most candidates opted to show the theory as a graph, a more successful choice than those who presented alternative diagrams which could only attract limited reward. There were a number of areas where marks were lost on the diagram:
- Axes not clearly labelled
 - The population line only overstretched food production: it did not indicate the population checks bringing it back down again
 - The different growth rates were not clear between the two lines - many actually looked more like Boserup

In the second part of this question, worth 5 marks, candidates had to outline the theory. This part of the question contained stronger answers but there were still significant gaps in geographical knowledge. Stronger candidates were able to discuss the different arithmetic and geometric rates of increase and the resultant consequences and then were able to identify and describe the impact of the positive and negative checks that might control the population size. A few lost marks by naming the positive and negative checks but not elaborating with examples. The most significant loss of marks occurred when candidates discussed Boserup's theory and ignored Malthus. Students need to identify the demands of the questions with greater precision to prevent this type of error from happening.

- Q2 (a)** This question expected the candidates to discuss the issues around greenfield developments. It allowed for differentiation as there was a wide variation in answers. Weaker candidates answered this question by looking just at brownfield sites, this limited their credit-worthy comments and lowered their marks. Others lost marks by only focussing on one problem of such developments, with a lack of depth in this issue. The wording of the question clearly indicated there should be more than one problem. Stronger candidates were able to answer this with a wide range of ideas and many brought in place examples to illustrate the points they were making.
- (b)** This question asked students to explain why gentrification could lead to protests such as those identified in the photographs shown. The resources clearly enabled candidates to see that local people felt that they had been priced or pushed out and this created resentment. There was good differentiation in this question and there was a wide range of marks awarded. Better candidates fully incorporated the Resource into their answer and clearly referenced it. By contrast, too many candidates completely ignored the Resource, and their marks were lowered due to this. If 'own knowledge' or 'resource use' is not addressed by candidates in this type of question, they will be unlikely to access Level 3 marks.
- (c)** This question asked candidates to name one rural planning measure and outline why planning is important to manage the countryside. This was the most poorly answered part of Question 2. Perhaps, this is a reflection that this type of question has not appeared before. The acceptable answers from the specification are SSIs, ASSIs, AONBs and National Parks. The vast majority were able to correctly name one rural planning measure and gained marks for this. However, a significant number were not able to accurately discuss why planning of the countryside was needed. Many were confused with conservation and discussing the importance of protecting the natural landscapes without reference to controlling human impact to limit damage.
- Q3 (a) (i)** This was an accessible, straightforward question which saw most candidates gain full marks. Using the Resource, candidates had to describe the trends shown for the emerging markets globally and the USA percentage of world GDP. Good answers combined both figures and a description of the trend as rising or decreasing over time. The main area where candidates lost marks was for omitting figures or using inaccurate figures from the Resource. Careful attention needs to be paid when quoting data from Resources; accuracy is important.
- (ii)** There was a wide variation in marks for this question. Candidates were expected to explain how one factor had led to their case study growing as an Emerging Market. Marks were lost for the following reasons:
- Candidates did not focus on one reason but rather offered an extensive list. This meant that none had the required detail for higher marks
 - Candidates did discuss one change in their country, but failed to explain directly how this helped them become an emerging market. For example- China has a large migrating rural work force but this needed elaboration to explain how it was beneficial in creating an Emerging Market

- Candidates attempted to answer this question with no specific Emerging Market. Rather they talked about BRICS or MINT regions in general terms, rather than naming a country. Specifics are required for this type of question
- (b) (i)** This was the most difficult part of Question 3 and created a wide variation in marks. Stronger candidates answered this question well, offering figures, place names and also weaknesses. They were able to identify the overall trend, areas that were most effective across MDGs and SDGs and finally identify that since the SDGs, some regions had seen a slight decline. However, marks were lost in the following areas:
- Candidates disregarded the ‘evaluation’ command word and failed to identify any weaknesses in the trends shown or areas that were improving at a slower rate
 - Candidates answered this question with no regional/place names from the resource and used vague trends for global changes
 - Candidates failed to incorporate figures from the resource into their answer
- (ii)** This was reasonably well answered and clearly many candidates had learnt the evaluation of their MDG. Most were able to answer this effectively with excellent use of place names and figures. This has clearly been taught well in schools. However, marks were lost in the following areas, and this should be the basis of improvement in the future:
- Inadequate figures: their MDGs need to be evaluated with a broad range of data
 - Places: specific places/regions must be mentioned
 - The evaluation should be balanced by discussing both the improvements that have been made and areas where improvements have been less significant

Q4 This was the most popular question in Section B, few candidates did not attempt it. Many answered well, covering all the key elements fully. To achieve Level 3 candidates needed to describe the pattern of birth and death rate at each named stage and explain fully the birth and death rates levels. A place example was needed for every stage. The most significant areas where marks were lost were:

- No figures were provided for each stage. At A-Level candidates need to go beyond stating the birth and death rates were high/low or falling. They need to illustrate this with figures. Some candidates are still writing these figures inaccurately, not as “per thousand”
- Most were able to describe the birth and death rates, but the differentiating factor was the quality of the explanations. Some were exceptionally brief, offering vague comments and general reasons. It would be prudent for schools to work on this area of the Demographic Transition Model
- Total population was frequently omitted. Candidates need to be reminded the Demographic Transition model is not just about birth and death rates. All three needed to be discussed for higher level marks
- Some candidates were unable to offer any place examples with specific information

Q5 It was clear that many centres had covered this question well and students that attempted it seemed, in the most part, to be well prepared. They knew the areas in the specification that were needed in the answer and focussed on covering all three with good factual and specific case study information. The level of case study detail in this essay has improved over the years as familiarity grows in this area of the specification.

Some areas for improvement should be:

- Some candidates used a MEDC case study in place of the required LEDC. Careful reading of the question is essential to ensure mark-worthy material is presented
- Some omitted one of the three issues: informal settlements, economic activity, or service provision. All three were needed for Level 3 marks and there should be good balance across the three elements. Economic activity tended to be the briefest of the three elements
- Some candidates did cover all three elements but failed to provide sufficient facts and figures. This has improved but some need to develop this further
- Candidates should be made aware that answering this question without a clear case study will severely impact their ability to achieve the higher marks

Q6 This was the least popular essay question. It required candidates first to discuss the problems associated with defining development and then to explain and evaluate any three measures of development. Some answers introduced excellent, detailed information that showed command of the topic. More usually, information was sketchy and lacked precision. Many did not achieve Level 3 in this answer. The areas of concern were:

- Many candidates omitted or only briefly attempted to elaborate on the problems with defining development and focussed on the measures. This impacted their ability to achieve marks beyond Level 2. The issues of defining development should be a focus as this was poorly attempted. Past mark schemes can be used for guidance on the points that need to be made by candidates
- Too many did not reference place. 'Reference to place' is a term frequently used in questions and it is important that this aspect of a question is not neglected
- A significant number of candidates named and described three measures without evaluation, and some evaluations were poorly attempted. For each measure it had to be clearly named, described, then strengths and weaknesses offered. Frequently the latter two areas were not covered.

Assessment Unit AS 3 Fieldwork Skills and Techniques in Geography

Unit Overview

In accordance with a ministerial directive, AS3 Fieldwork Skills and Techniques in Geography was eligible for omission in Summer 2022. Similarly, GCSE Unit 3 Fieldwork was eligible for omission. Given the level of disruption to education as a result of the COVID pandemic, it was unsurprising that most Centres availed of these omissions. Consequently, the majority of AS Level geographers have little or no prior experience of geographical fieldwork and its assessment. This resulted, at least in part, in generally lower outcomes for Question 1. Most examiners commented on candidates' inability to address the demand(s) of the questions asked and the restricted levels of fieldwork-specific details in their responses. By contrast, it is pleasing to report that marks for Question 2 were generally high. Clearly, candidates had thoroughly prepared for the range of geographical skills and techniques examined in this question. The paper produced a wide range of marks, allowing for a differentiated outcome, and the level of language in the exam paper appeared to present no obvious barriers to comprehension.

- Q1 (a)** Explanations of secondary data were often inadequate, but many made appropriate reference to a specific secondary source (including specific OS map details, textbook authors/title, a website address etc.) and were rewarded accordingly. With regards to the contribution of the selected source to the fieldwork undertaken, responses were often restricted in detail. Once again, candidates must be reminded of the need to incorporate clear and convincing links to their own fieldwork investigation.
- (b)** This part had two key elements. Firstly, candidates were required to explain one sampling method from a choice of random, stratified, systematic and pragmatic. Surprisingly, 1 and 0 marks were commonly awarded, with only a minority of candidates providing a detailed explanation of the chosen sampling method. Unfortunately, too many candidates neglected this discrete element of the question and focussed squarely on the second component.
- Secondly, candidates were asked to describe how the chosen sampling method was used, or could have been used, in their fieldwork investigation. Most candidates were able to provide some descriptive details, though many provided evaluative comments which fell beyond the scope of the question asked. Only well-prepared candidates described their chosen sampling method and infused their responses with fieldwork-specific facts and details.
- (c) (i)** Well-prepared candidates competently demonstrated their graphical presentation skills and full marks were commonly awarded. Occasionally, marks were lost when:
- The title failed to refer to both variables displayed on the graph
 - The dependent and independent variables were confused
 - The units of measurement were omitted from the axes of the graph
 - An inappropriate line graph was plotted when the x-axis variable displayed discrete rather than continuous data
 - The scaling of the x- and/or y-axis failed to encompass all values
 - Graph-work lacked completion or displayed some inaccuracy
 - The candidate failed to make sufficient use of the space provided

Candidates are reminded that they must not amend the data in their Summary Statement and Table of Data Booklet in order to make it “fit” the graph paper provided. Instead, candidates must construct appropriate axes which encompass the data collected in the field.

It is important to note that, since transitioning to online marking, graphs must no longer be completed using colouring pencils (current script scanning is in black and white only). Centres and candidates must develop alternative approaches to graphical presentation.

- (c) (ii)** Although this appeared to be a relatively straightforward part question, many candidates focussed on the methodological description and neglected the evaluative component. Most candidates correctly discussed a variable displayed on their graph and could, therefore, access maximum marks in the question. Only a small number of candidates described a data collection method for a variable not displayed on their graph.

Only well-prepared candidates could produce a clear description of a primary data collection method, including specific details concerning the equipment and techniques employed in the field. Candidates often lost marks when they provided a basic and/or incomplete description of their methodology. Candidates who chose to discuss river discharge, for example, often failed to address the two key elements of cross-sectional area and velocity. And those who described the measurement of a particular soil characteristic, such as pH, organic content, or moisture content, often described the extraction of the soil sample and neglected the subsequent laboratory processes. Occasionally, candidates described a sampling procedure; marks were limited to Level 1 as a result.

The evaluative component of the question was often neglected, restricting the answer to a maximum of [4] marks. When attempted, evaluative comments were usually superficial or tenuous in nature, lacking the level of detail and development required for Level 3 marks.

- (d)** This was the most poorly answered part question in the examination. A significant proportion of candidates did not attempt it and those who did were commonly awarded low marks. Candidates often lost marks because they failed to refer to a specific hypothesis and provided only basic statements lacking in depth and development.

Most candidates who understood the demands of the question chose to discuss the appropriateness of Spearman’s Rank when investigating a specific hypothesis. Well-prepared candidates provided relevant comments concerning correlation, significance, and the ability to accept or reject the hypothesis.

A small proportion of candidates elected to discuss the appropriateness of mean, median, mode and/or range. Often, however, these responses lacked the necessary levels of fieldwork-specific depth and detail.

- (e)** Candidates performed well in this question. Most recommended a valid modification/improvement to their investigation and provided a clear explanation of its possible impact on the reliability of the geographical conclusions drawn. However, it is important to note that some candidates erroneously based their answer on an extension. Given that the focus of the question was modification, no marks could be awarded.

Q2 (a) (i) It is pleasing to note that most candidates accurately calculated the correct Spearman's Rank value. Those candidates who calculated an incorrect result were often awarded a proportion of marks for their working out. Most candidates secured maximum marks for their interpretation of the statistical result, with many successfully using the table/graph supplied to determine the significance level of 99.9%. It is interesting to note that a number of candidates struggled to interpret the significance of a negative result, perhaps because the interpretation table/graph are presented using positive values.

(ii) Candidates, generally speaking, struggled with this question. A considerable number provided lengthy analyses and regurgitated data provided in the table. No marks could be awarded in such cases. Most candidates failed to explain the relationship between the two variables, that is, Gross National Income per capita and Infant Mortality Rate, and provided only lists of basic reasons. In such cases, only low marks could be awarded.

Only the most astute candidates focussed on the relationship in question and explained that higher levels of economic development resulted in more investment into healthcare, vaccinations, sanitation and/or food supply. Their explanations were often developed using specific details/examples and, ultimately, connected to the resultant Infant Mortality Rate. These candidates were rightly rewarded for their insight and focus on the relationship in question.

(b) (i) Almost all candidates recognised the close proximity of informal settlements to the Sabarmati River and were awarded [1]. A significant proportion of candidates utilised compass directions with accuracy, often indicating the higher concentration of informal settlements on the river's east bank and were awarded a further [1]. Responses which described the distribution using right/left/top/bottom terminology were not credited. Only a minority of responses made accurate use of the scale provided.

(ii) This was a very poorly answered question. Unfortunately, the majority of candidates erroneously suggested that the land area in question (18km²) was small. Such responses could not be credited. Astute candidates clearly recognised that a clustered result is linked to a large land area which lowers the Nearest Neighbour result.

(iii) This was a very accessible question with most candidates able to identify an additional use of satellite imagery in geographical studies.

(iv) Most candidates accurately calculated the mean and determined the median for the data set provided.

A significant proportion of candidates erroneously discussed the fact that the mean presented was a decimal figure. Mean figures which are rounded to 2 decimal places cannot be considered inappropriate when summarising a data set. In the case of this data set, clearly the presence of an extreme value distorted the mean. The median, which is unaffected by extreme values is, therefore, more appropriate. Those candidates who recognised the influence of an extreme value on the mean often used data and/or place names from the resource to support their explanations. They were credited for their efforts.

- (c) (i)** The majority of candidates accurately presented the data on the compound bar chart provided and achieved maximum marks. Those candidates who lost marks often:
- failed to add the value for moderate food insecurity to severe in order to determine the upper limit of the compound bar
 - did not adhere to the conventions presented in the graph, including placing severe at the base of the compound bar and moderate at the top
 - made an error when plotting severe food insecurity, which resulted in an error when plotting the moderate value.
- (ii)** Descriptions were good and made use of trends and data for the two regions. Only a minority of candidates calculated the overall increase for North America/Europe and/or overall decrease for Sub-Saharan Africa and achieved maximum marks as a result.

Assessment Unit A2

Subject Overview

This will be the last year in which accommodation will be made for Covid, whilst the overall award starts the journey back towards pre-Covid patterns after the higher grades of the Covid years. In 2023 candidates had to sit the full suite of papers but were made aware, through release of Advance Information (AI), what areas of the specification were to be questioned. AI must have helped schools and pupils alike but may also have had a negative impact on this examination suite. In particular, it may have encouraged candidates to prepare essays in advance given that they knew which topics were coming up. However, they did not know the questions and some candidates just set down their prepared material with seemingly little reference to the actual question before them. An examiner termed such offerings as ‘regurgitated case studies’. In summary, the Principal Examiner for A21 concluded that ‘the standard of responses was modest, especially given that schools had received Advance Information’.

Another issue that raised comments from examiners this year regarded command words. Too often these were ignored or, to be charitable, misinterpreted. ‘Evaluate’, ‘explain’, ‘discuss’ and so on, have different meanings and candidates should be made aware of them and how to respond appropriately. Note, no command word means ‘write all you know about’. Basically, candidates should just read the question and answer it.

Candidates should be aware of what is on the geography specification. Thus, a candidate choosing to answer a question on, say, urban ecological footprints, should know the meaning of this term from the specification. Sometimes this was clearly not the case.

Some candidates did not handle resources optimally. Sometimes they were neglected, especially if the question also presented the opportunity to write down a case study. Resources are there to be used, in fact to be ‘plundered’ in the words of the A21 Principal Examiner. Weaker candidates who bring limited knowledge to the examination can help themselves by utilising the resources as much as possible, whilst in the decision-making exercise (A23) it was noted that the best candidates were those who fully exploited the resources.

Some more minor general points:

- Examiners complained about the standard of handwriting: it was ‘much more difficult this year’ said one (though from Chief Examiner’s personal observation A2 handwriting in 2023 was generally much better than at AS, where it was really poor).
- Candidates should be aware that an examination is a formal process and answers should not resort to slang or other informal language.
- Many candidates answered in different order to the questions on the paper. Some just answered the higher tariff Part (c) questions first followed by Parts (a) and (b) but others wandered about answering sections from both their questions in seemingly random order. This makes the script difficult to mark. This, of course, is not a concern for the candidate, but losing sight of where they are in the script might result in a rubric violation.
- One examiner praised the technique taught to some candidates to begin each part question on a fresh page, thus leaving room for revisiting the answer.
- Note that from 2024 AGG11, the physical geography paper, will transfer to online marking. Candidates’ papers are currently scanned in monotone, so diagrams drawn on lined pages should not be coloured with colouring pencils. Further guidance on this will be issued from CCEA by means of a circular.

Assessment Unit A2 1 Physical Processes, Landforms and Management

Unit Overview

This was the last year that AGG11 will be examined in hard copy, from 2024 its marking moves online. In 2023 rubric violations were rare and the majority of candidates answered both optional questions fully. However, in some cases, the standard of responses was modest, especially given that schools had received Advance Information.

Candidates should be strongly encouraged to address the command words of the question, rather than writing everything that they know about that topic. 'Evaluate' seemed to be the command most often neglected. Candidates would benefit from paying enhanced attention to the interpretation of phrases such as 'to help you' and 'with reference to place/s'. Candidates should be reminded to avoid the use of informal language in the context of an examination.

The standard of case study responses was variable, ranging from learned responses which did not address the demands of the question, to detailed answers with appropriately manipulated knowledge. In too many cases apparent regurgitation of notes occurred. Similarly, the use and interpretation of resource material was variable; candidates should be encouraged to plunder resources fully and to apply this information when answering the question.

Option A: Plate tectonics: Theory and Outcomes

Q1 This was a popular choice.

- (a) The question asked candidates to describe the global pattern of seismic activity and explain differences noted from the global pattern of mortality risk posed from earthquakes. Candidates appeared more comfortable with the description element of this sub-section than with the explanation. The latter, at times, lacked validity and/or range of comment.
- (b) Both plate and sub-plate processes needed to be contrasted in relation to the occurrence of volcanic activity at constructive plate margins, but not at conservative margins. Whilst most candidates were able to describe the contrast required, some had difficulty in developing the explanation in terms of the plate and sub-plate processes. Some candidates confused the margin types, whilst others used overly simple terminology.
- (c) This essay asked candidates to evaluate the effectiveness of both preparation for, and response to, seismic activity, referring to their chosen small scale case study area. Japan and the 2011 event was the study of choice and many handled the demands of preparation, response, and evaluation effectively. Some candidates presented Nepal but the lack of any information on preparation made this a less than ideal case study.

Q2 (a) This question required candidates to explain the location and formation processes of two tectonic landforms from a list of four, which included ocean ridges, deep sea trenches, island arcs and fold mountains. Whilst the location was straightforward, the description of the formation processes varied greatly from simplistic KS3 level responses to more sophisticated answers addressing the nature of ridge-push, slab-pull, hydration melting and buoyancy at constructive, destructive and collision margins.

- (b) From the given resource relating to the potential use of animal behaviour in earthquake prediction, candidates needed to apply this information and add in their own knowledge of how dilation theory may also help to predict seismic events. Resource use was too often limited by a lack of reference or too much verbatim quotation. Inevitably, candidates with a clear understanding of dilation theory fared better.
- (c) Many candidates brought much factual knowledge to their response to this essay with a focus on the socio-economic and environmental hazards of volcanic activity. The question was approached in a variety of ways – a list of volcanic events and/or examples from which socio-economic and environmental hazards were drawn, or a review of specific volcanic hazards with examples quoted of the required socio-economic/environmental impacts. However, some candidates reverted to describing ‘people, environment and economy’. Each approach was judged on the range and relevance of impacts and exemplars.

Option B: Tropical ecosystems: Nature and Sustainability

- Q3**
- (a) Most candidates managed to balance their answer on the two bulleted points, describing the climatic characteristics of the desert ecosystem and explaining how these characteristics influence the biomass of desert ecosystems. However, some did not fully link the climate to the nature of the biomass, flora and fauna described. On occasion, responses were vague.
 - (b) This question required candidates to use the resource presented on an irrigation scheme. A balance between the two elements of the question (social and economic) was not always seen for the resource was, at times, underused or, alternatively, dominated the response.
 - (c) In the regional case study, specific detail on the large scale developments within a tropical forest ecosystem, was sometimes absent, or the threats were generalised, lacking nutrient cycle and zonal soil specifics.
- Q4**
- (a) Most candidates managed to balance their answer on the two bulleted points; describing the climatic characteristics of the tropical forest ecosystem and explaining how these characteristics influence the biomass of such ecosystems. However, some did not fully link the climate to the nature of the biomass, flora and fauna described. In general, it was more common for responses to focus exclusively on flora when discussing biomass. On occasion, responses were vague.
 - (b) This question required candidates to use the resource presented on the seasonal changing position of the ITCZ. A number of candidates seemed to find it difficult to make direct use of the resource in their answer linking the position of tropical grasslands to the ITCZ, and there remains confusion, albeit understandable, over assuming a Northern hemisphere view of summer and winter.
 - (c) When asked to use their regional case study of an arid/semi-arid tropical environment to discuss attempts to find solutions to the problems of irrigation, Pakistan dominated. Perhaps because they were presenting model answers, some responses took too long to focus on attempted solutions and, by implication, problems with irrigation use.

Option C: Dynamic Coastal Environments

Q5 This was the more popular question in this option.

- (a)** This question on coastal protection strategies seemed to be straightforward. However, a number of candidates did not fully discuss the operation of each protection strategy shown and, too frequently, the terminology used was simplistic. Better answers drew more from the resource than simply the strategy name.
- (b)** Many candidates were able to distinguish between swash and drift-aligned coasts. However, at times, a lack of, or vague, place/s reference for illustration undermined the outcome significantly.
- (c)** The essay required candidates to describe and explain the threat of rising sea levels due to climate change, on both the physical and human environment. As in previous years the Maldives and Kiribati were the common case studies, although the Nile delta was also used by some. Some, even otherwise competent students, wasted time with an extended description of the reasons behind sea level rise and/or governmental responses rather than focussing on the threat – human and physical. Again, perhaps utilising learned model answers, some candidates used a different form of words to those set out in the question.

- Q6**
- (a)** On being asked to describe how eustatic and isostatic processes operate, some candidates self-limited as they did not provide reference to place/s for illustration. Better candidates recognised that both eustatic and isostatic changes can raise or lower relative sea level, commenting on relativity.
 - (b)** In this resource-based sub-section relating to the formation of coastal spits, the diagrams presented varied from unreadable to acceptable; this is a skill candidates should be encouraged to practise. The written answers were too often simplistic in the terminology used and formation process sequence; again, this is an area for improvement.
 - (c)** The case study question required candidates to select from their regional study knowledge and evaluate the impact and sustainability of hard and soft coastal engineering strategies on the human environment. Too many attempted to write 'all that we know about' responses, vainly hoping that they would satisfy the question requirements. In addition, references to soft engineering strategies, at times, required augmentation.

Option D: Climate Change: Past and Present

Q7 A rare sighting.

- (a)** This was well handled by most candidates who attempted to define the term Holocene and describe the astronomic and solar processes that may have caused the end of the last glaciation.
- (b)** Surprisingly, the resource presented of a lowland landscape during and after glaciation was often not well handled. Candidates needed to refer to how both glacial and fluvio-glacial processes created the post-glacial environment as presented.
- (c)** Given the scope of the question, responses here were often short and lacked both range of impacts and specific detail. More detail is expected when candidates are asked to discuss the impacts of climate change at the global scale.

- Q8**
- (a)** On being asked to distinguish between two named climate change mitigation strategies, there were some sound responses; however, in others the relevant terminology was misused or misunderstood.
 - (b)** In Part (i) candidates with a clear understanding of the Holocene were able to effectively relate that to the resource graph, which showed temperature change as recorded by ice cores and direct measurement in Greenland. In Part (ii), which asked candidates to describe and explain one source of evidence, other than ice cores for past climate change, responses using tree ring analysis rather than the more direct alternatives of pollen analysis or ocean cores, while credited, were limited in their scope.
 - (c)** The case study of a post-glacial environment was always of Co. Down, although a wider geography of quoted places was common. Specifics regarding the benefits and problems for socio-economic development in such landscapes were limited in some answers, with others quoting effectively from current town development plans.

Assessment Unit A2 2 Processes and Issues in Human Geography

Unit Overview

Option A (Cultural Geography) was rarely answered; almost everybody answered Option D (Tourism) with either Option B (Planning for sustainable settlements) or Option C (Ethnic diversity). One examiner summed up her impression thus: 'Overall the general performance of candidates in the paper was mixed. There were plenty of opportunities for candidates to pick up marks using resource material while some questions allowed for differentiation of abilities to be catered for.'

Only one examiner reported timing issues, another adding that while there was no evidence of candidates being short of time, there was evidence of them being short of knowledge. There were few rubric violations.

Perhaps because of the release of AI, there was an issue identified regarding the use, or rather misuse, of pre-prepared, learnt essays. Some 'candidates spent so much time trying to tell their "case study story" they forgot about the resource material', reported an examiner. Furthermore, learnt essays frequently did not present a focus on the question set, as is seen in comments on individual questions below.

Another common error was candidates not noting or responding to the command words, especially 'evaluate' or 'explain'. There were also cases of candidates not reading the question, for example missing the word 'both' in Part 1(c).

Candidates need to be familiar with the specification, there is little excuse for candidates not to know a key term such as 'urban ecological footprint' which features in the specification or not knowing the processes creating ethnic diversity.

Option A: Cultural Geography

This was the least frequently chosen of the four options.

Q1 'Accessible' reported one examiner.

- (a) Generally well answered, with useful examples. Clear distinctions were seen between cultural and natural landscapes, usually with satisfactory place reference.
- (b) Here candidates were required to use the resource and their own learnt material to explain how social exclusion and discrimination in relation to gender might be reduced. Some answers here were unbalanced, with either the resource or own material being neglected. 'Explain' as a command word caused problems to some as did the challenge to focus on how gendered social exclusion and discrimination might be reduced, despite the prompts in the resource. Resources are there to be 'plundered', recall.
- (c) The essay required candidates to discuss the effects of both out-migration and in-migration on both service provision and economic activity, with reference to small scale case study areas. This was generally well answered, although some focussed on the causes rather than the impacts of out-migration. Mostly, the case studies were Barra and Peterborough as per the textbook and they had been learnt well, perhaps at the prompting of the Advance Information. However, reproducing a learnt, pre-prepared essay saw some neglect to respond to the actual question's focus on service provision and economic activity.

- Q2** This was more popular than Question 1.
- (a)** Well answered on the whole, mostly with valid examples used to deepen the response. Some answers were stand-alone definitions of voluntary and forced migration, which was not quite what the question asked. Better candidates deepened their presentations with reference to place.
 - (b)** The description of migration barriers caused few problems, the more difficult aspect of the question being the effect of the barriers on migration flows. Again, answers might be strengthened by exemplars.
 - (c)** Being presented with a world map showing average download speeds, candidates had to use that information, alongside their own knowledge, to explain the economic, social and political issues that bring about global contrasts in the provision of cyberspace facilities. Some candidates lost out by a misreading of the question and focussing on impacts of, rather than causes for, global contrasts in cyberspace facilities. Some of the examiners noted a lack of resource use in answers here.

Option B: Planning for Sustainable Settlements

- Q3** 'Accessible' said one Examiner.
- (a)** This was well answered, many had a clear knowledge of urban ecological footprints, although some were unclear, and others made only tenuous links to sustainability. There is little excuse for candidates not to know and be able to discuss a key term such as urban ecological footprint which features in the specification.
 - (b)** Here, the question asked about how urban waste management systems can be related to sustainability. Some candidates lacked the required focus on sustainability in favour, often, of detailing their case study material, usually relating to Belfast or Leicester. One examiner concluded that orange bags are obviously the way forward for waste management around the world.
 - (c)** Candidates were given information about urban traffic management in Mumbai and were required to use it alongside their own case study material to evaluate the effectiveness of such strategies. One examiner stated that this was her highest scoring question. Responses presented detailed case studies as well as extracting material from the accessible resource. Not focussing on evaluation as required was the most frequent problem. Candidates really must take notice of command words.
- Q4**
- (a)** The sustainability of two different modes of transport was to be compared to answer this question. However, comparisons were not always seen, although the actual modes of transport were usually described competently. The impact on sustainability aspect of the question was sometimes neglected.
 - (b)** The question required candidates to explain why brownfield development is usually considered to be more sustainable than greenfield development. Greenfield and brownfield urban development sites were both known and used, and the question was often handled well.
 - (c)** Candidates were presented with information on a proposed retail development called "American Dream Mall" and were to use it, alongside their own knowledge, to discuss the environmental and social consequences of such schemes. Sometimes there was too heavy a reliance on the "American Dream Mall" resource to the detriment of them bringing in their own material.

Option C: Ethnic Diversity

One Examiner noted that scripts she saw answering on ethnic diversity scored lower than those in settlement and tourism; another agreed that this was the most challenging unit. There was some basic confusion between the terms used in the study of ethnic diversity. Candidates should be aware of terms from the specification.

- Q5 (a)** This seemed to be straightforward, candidates being asked to explain how any two processes create ethnic diversity. However, some candidates used incorrect processes, struggling to identify the factors which create ethnic diversity. Many were able to provide a definition of the factors but lacked elaboration of how they cause ethnic diversity.
- (b)** The three aspects of the nature of ethnic conflict (civil disobedience, civil war, and terrorism) were named in the question which helped achievement. This question was well-addressed with most candidates able to give a definition supported by an example.
- (c)** The essay required candidates to use the given information about the Indian caste system, alongside their own knowledge, to explain how role and residential concentration influence perceived ethnic and social identity. This was often answered poorly, one examiner noting that the question was challenging. However, leaving out their own material, as some candidates did, was down to them not making themselves aware of how to approach such a question. One examiner was disturbed by answers being couched in social class terms.
- Q6 (a)** Here there was the same problem as the equivalent part of Question 5. When asked to explain any two causes of ethnic conflict, there were incorrect answers referring to aspects of the nature or responses to ethnic conflict, rather than causes.
- (b)** When responding to the question as set, explain why the definition of ethnicity requires several factors to be considered, stand-alone answers describing different factors did not score well. Some became confused with the actual factors that needed to be considered and often failed to identify them. Again, it must be stressed that candidates should have a knowledge of the specification.
- (c)** The essay required candidates to use the resource given and their own case study of an ethnically diverse city to describe and explain the processes which maintain ethnic diversity. Segregation was handled well in responses here whereas multiculturalism was less detailed. Clear case study detail was often presented although there were answers which used the wrong case study at an incorrect scale. Better candidates were able to combine both their case study and resource material, although others struggled, some being so determined to present their pre-learnt case study of (usually) Belfast that they neglected the resource.

Option D: Tourism

- Q7** (a) Following presentation of a resource showing crowds of tourists visiting sites in Beijing, candidates were to discuss the challenges that might arise from mass tourism. A common problem was the lack of their own material, although the challenges of mass tourism were generally known.
- (b) This question, which required candidates to explain how mass tourism has developed into a global industry through the availability of package holidays and developments in transport, generally caused problems to only a few, although better depth regarding transport developments was needed, reported one examiner.
- (c) Within this essay, the negative impacts of ecotourism were to be described and explained with reference to case study material. Examples were seen here of the common problem this year of not focussing on the command words, 'evaluation' being the case here. Also, we saw too frequently the use of pre-learnt answers which missed the actual question's focus, in this case on the negative impacts of ecotourism. That said, there were some fine, comprehensive answers here. Costa Rica was the most common case study.
- Q8** Many candidates obviously chose this question due to the opportunity awarded to present their Mallorca essay.
- (a) Poorly answered, many candidates lacking knowledge of the Green Globe Scheme or failing to bring in their own material. There were some issues regarding verbatim reproductions of the Resource. Answers were too descriptive reported one examiner. Candidates needed to combine information more succinctly from the resource and their own knowledge of the Green Globe Scheme to describe and evaluate its use in regulating ecotourism.
- (b) This was well-answered, Butler's model was known in detail by most, although there were a few strange diagrams presented. The relatively few problems related to a lack of place reference or the use of outdated examples. There was occasional confusion between Butler's Model and the pleasure periphery model. Most were able to use the Butler Model to explain how tourist resorts change over time, with sufficient reference to places.
- (c) Here the essay required an evaluation of the success of a tourism management policy in reducing the negative social and environmental impacts of mass tourism using illustrative detail from a national or regional scale case study. One examiner described this as definitely the best attempted essay of the paper, usually with Mallorca as the named case study, often presented in commendable detail. Issues arose for some through a lack of focus on the evaluation of policies, that common command word problem again.

Assessment Unit A2 3 Decision Making

Unit Overview

This year the context for the Decision-Making Exercise (DME) considered whether commercial afforestation in Co. Leitrim, Ireland should be allowed to continue growing. The usual resources were available to candidates: maps, photographs, text, an infographic, and a graph. The first map was mainly for location purposes, whilst the other indicated the extent of the afforestation and highlighted the proportion in private ownership. Some photographs illustrated the Sitka spruce forestry and its operation, while another indicated the lack of undergrowth. Others illustrated opponents to the continued afforestation, an instance of clear felling and chemical usage. There were also photographs showing some of Leitrim's wildlife which might be threatened by further conifer afforestation – curlews and hen harriers, with the final photograph showing a pest for forestry operation – the tiny pine weevil. The resources were designed to ensure that candidates could get a clear impression of the proposed development relatively quickly, but also to illustrate the scale and detail of the proposal and its potential impacts. They also were provided to ensure that there was sufficient material to allow candidates to understand how the proposal would impact on employment and the economy, and on the environment.

In general, candidates appeared to find the material accessible, although only a few candidates made use of the graph showing the cumulative afforestation, and the continued planting each year, alongside the shift from public to private ownership (Resource 4). Some candidates made effective use of the photographs working them into their discussions. As has always been the case in this paper, the best candidates fully exploited the resource booklet, and the text on the question paper, drawing the key information out of the resources, and weaving it into well-crafted answers.

This paper has always tempted some candidates to use the resources provided too closely and to copy them out verbatim. Occasionally, examiners encounter a candidate who has meticulously copied the resources out in full. Even just altering a word or two or the order of an occasional sentence will result in penalties for a candidate. Some phrases or figures may be hard for candidates to find suitable alternatives for, especially in an examination situation, and those are acceptable and even expected. However, when large sections of the resource booklet are reproduced, verbatim, or nearly verbatim, the candidate has little chance to demonstrate their understanding of the issue and the marks allocated will reflect that. Centres know, and should pass on to their candidates, the penalties that inevitably occur when this happens; as such candidates are restricted to Level 1 and that, if carried throughout the whole paper, will result in a very depressed final mark. Sometimes, candidates who have used verbatim material in Parts A, B(i) and B(ii) revert to their own wording in Part C, and it is unfortunate for such candidates that they did not take that approach throughout. Centres should continue to stress that the Decision-Making challenge is for a candidate to take the arguments presented in the paper, examine them, and demonstrate their grasp of the issue by presenting a report very largely in their own words. Not to do so will result in limited outcomes.

Update on issue

Candidates are told in the paper that they should not use any information that they might know about the issue which is not present in the Resource Booklet and Question paper. However, it may be of interest for teachers and candidates to know that the planting of more conifer forests continues to be a live issue in Leitrim, and opinion still appears to be divided on the issue. Some of that plays out on social media, with 'Save Leitrim', which opposes more coniferous forestry, arguing that some farmers are being let down by a small number of other farmers and by their leadership (<https://twitter.com/saveleitrim>). Clearly there are some farmers in the county who are happy with continued forestry expansion, perhaps they relish the opportunity to diversify their small farms, or to sell their newly more valuable land. They may see opportunities for employment in forestry. Save Leitrim suggests that the governmental body responsible for forests, Coillte, are more interested in generating profits than in protecting the environment. Coillte dispute that, claiming on their website that they deliver "the multiple benefits of our forests for climate, nature, wood and people" (www.coillte.ie). The balance between the possible economic and employment gains, and the potential threats which would remove those gains, against the argued negative impact on the environment, and the counterarguments to that, are what are at the heart of this DME. It seems that this controversy is set to continue for some time.

Question A: Introduction

It is not unusual for this examination to begin with a requirement for a description of the proposal for or against continued forestry development in County Leitrim, and the need for such. While fairly straightforward for most candidates, some were drawn into long descriptions of the geography of Leitrim itself and the population characteristics of the area. Unless the linkages between this and the description of the project, or the need for it, were made clear, this was irrelevant. Some examiners found that description was most challenging for candidates while others felt that need could have been developed more, but most candidates found this not an unusual start to the paper, and those who made sure that they focussed on both the need for the project and the description of it, rather than a wider description, generally handled this well. However, one examiner commented that 'while the best candidates displayed in-depth understanding one candidate wrote two sides of excellent material but mismanaged time and had only time for a paragraph for C'. Even this early in the paper, the candidates should be thinking about the 'one minute – one mark' guide to time allocation in this paper and no more than, and ideally a little less than, 10 minutes should have been committed to this 10 mark section.

Question B: The Likely Impact

Parts B(i) and B(ii), as usual, provide most of the marks for the report, and most candidates rightly concentrated their effort on these.

(i) Employment and The Economy

The resources provided allowed a detailed discussion of the potential benefits of continuing to expand coniferous forestry, and this was generally well recognised and discussed. Some examiners felt that the counterarguments were less well discussed. There was the potential vulnerability of increased dependence on forestry as a monoculture, with a susceptibility to pest infestation, or to the potential impact should costs of trading increase across the EU/UK border. There was also the wider impact of increased land prices on local farmers and declining populations more generally with a consequent knock-on to wider rural services and the employment opportunities provided there. Some candidates did, of course, exploit these resources, but a number found the counterarguments more challenging to articulate.

(ii) The Environment

There were challenges in this section also and some candidates here too had to dig into the resources to ensure a balanced answer. The nuance of farmers in more fertile areas of Ireland buying the relatively cheap land in Co Leitrim to plant conifers so that their carbon taxes would be reduced was a lot to expect in a time-pressured examination. However, some candidates did grasp this point and incorporated it very effectively in this section, and they were appropriately rewarded. Others were able to gain excellent marks by using the remainder of the resources thoroughly and effectively. While several examiners highlighted an imbalance in the arguments and counterarguments in this section, one said ‘most of my candidates synthesized and developed arguments and counterarguments’. One error encountered in a few scripts was a discussion of the threats to the pine weevil, putting the pest alongside hen harriers and curlews under threat from increased afforestation. The more observant candidates recognised the pine weevil as a threat to forestry, rather than the other way round.

Question C: Conclusion

It is always pleasant to see something of a balance between those who argue for the proposal, and those who argue against it, in this case the support of coniferous forestry in Leitrim and those against. There is a balance in the resources in the DME which reflects the complex reality and challenges of the decision-making process ‘on the ground’. As ever, it was best for candidates to decide early in the conclusion what their stance would be, and better still to start this section with that statement. That allows the remainder of the answer to be a justification of that decision, with an examination of the strengths, and weaknesses, of the alternative argument. Candidates should continue to be alerted to the fact that Part C should not merely repeat the arguments in Parts B(i) and B(ii) as it is the only place in the paper where the relative strengths of the employment/economic and environmental arguments can be pitted against each other. As the question says, and it does every year, this section is about the ‘greater overall benefits’. Examiners are looking for, and will reward candidates, who try to balance the arguments on both sides, even while ultimately arguing that one set of arguments is stronger.

A small proportion of reports were incomplete or appeared to be rushed at the end, and the responses to Part C often tended to be shorter than those for Part A, despite their same mark allocation. Very occasionally Part C was omitted altogether. However, there were some excellent examples of the conclusion with candidates who took the opportunity to demonstrate a full understanding of this issue and who gave a spirited and well-constructed rationale for the decision reached.

Question: Format

While generally very straightforward, a few candidates drop one or both of these marks. Candidates should continue to be reminded that any temptation to improve on the headings and subheadings should be avoided and that each section of their report should be clearly set out using the headings and subheadings provided. It is also important that headings and subheadings are on different lines, and are not incorporated within the text of their written answers. Candidates should also be careful about the wording – for example, section C this year had the heading ‘Conclusion’ and, in other years, it can have a different heading. A very few candidates provide no structure to their reports at all. While this loses them both Format marks, it also makes it difficult for them to address the requirements of the report and they often lose other marks as a consequence.

Question: Role

This was generally well handled, and most candidates got both marks for adopting and maintaining the role of Mr Derek O'Donald. Often candidates adopt the role at the beginning of Part A and demonstrate maintenance of it in Part C, but it occurring anywhere in the answer is perfectly acceptable.

Question: Graph

This was done quite well. Most used correct techniques although there were a few line graphs connecting the proportions of various types of trees which was not appropriate. One examiner encountered a pie chart, which may be the first instance of that. It was excellent: well-drawn and accurate. However, while this seemed to work for this candidate, for most candidates it would not be recommended. The calculation required would be unnecessarily time-consuming and the opportunities for miscalculation might be considered too great. A bar chart, or some variation of that, would seem to be the most appropriate for this year's data. There were also some excellent compound bars with Leitrim and the Republic of Ireland side by side and the 100% divided into appropriately sized and coded categories. Some candidates appear to come to the exam hall ill-equipped for this task, despite its occurrence every year. They often complete their graph in pen. While these tend to be rather untidy, it is possible to score well if accurate and complete – it would be challenging to mark for tidiness, even if many examiners would wish that were possible. However, some of these candidates struggle to change a plotting error or to demonstrate effectively shading, thus the use of a pencil and ruler are certainly to be recommended. As always, some candidates and/or centres prefer graph paper, while others use the lined paper in the booklet. Either approach works, but neither will be particularly successful if an unsuitable scale is chosen. In that case, accuracy marks are likely to be lost. Despite the challenges articulated here, in many cases candidates gained the full eight marks for the graph and it appears that many centres have their candidates well prepared for this skill-based task.

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