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Examiners' Report June 2010

Principal Learning
Environmental and Land-based Studies
ES205 Plants and Animals and their Role in Society

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Level 2 Principal Learning in Environmental and Land-based Studies

Unit 5: Plants and Animals and their Role in Society

Introduction

This was the first series for this paper and there was a small entry. The comments in this report will therefore be generally aimed at the performance and future direction of the paper, rather than concentrating too much on how learners performed in this series.

Centres need to be aware that this unit is an external formal exam, and at Level 2 broadly equivalent to A*-C GCSE. This makes it demanding even though accessibility has been ensured in all parts of the paper. Learners were entered who had little hope of reaching this level. Centres therefore need to do one or more of the following:

- Prepare learners fully and enter them when they are *capable* of achievement
- Make learners aware of the impact of this unit on their overall qualification - less academically-able learners may not do so well on this unit but this will be balanced by achievements in other units
- Maximise the skills and responses to the earlier simpler questions and to the Level 1 criteria for 'levels marked' questions to ensure that learners achieve higher than U

This is a work-related subject with a strong applied approach, and the external examination will seek to assess learners in similar situations. It is therefore important that centres stress the need for learners to read the stimulus information carefully before they answer questions and then be prepared to use the information within their responses. In order to ensure that the 'applied' part of the assessment has prominence, generic 'learnt' material will only gain limited credit.

Deliverers should ensure that learners are aware of the requirements of the full range of command words that might be used at this level. The paper will tend to have simpler command words at the beginning with an incline of difficulty to more challenging requirements towards the end of the paper.

In most cases the questions that require shorter responses will be 'point marked' and the longer ones will be 'levels marked'. For the latter, centres need to fully and critically use all the information in the exam paper, including the resources and details within the question stem. Levels marking rewards learners who can show their ability to use higher level skills in their responses - not just offer more points at the same level. It will be the ability to both apply their responses and offer a correct interpretation of the command words that will allow them to rise to the top levels of the mark scheme. Learners who produce material that is of a generic nature will usually be limited to Level 1 as a key requirement of Level 2 will be to apply their learning.

Deliverers should ensure that all the parts of the 'What you need to learn' has been covered before learners are entered for the external assessment.

Report on individual questions

The whole paper appeared to be accessible to the learners and they were able to complete the paper in the time available.

Question 1(a)

This question was intended as a simple introduction to the exam paper that was accessible to all (87.5% achieved full marks). In future such resources will be colour photographs which will improve our ability to provide learners with real world applied stimulus material.

Question 1(b)

The incline was putting their answers in a matrix. Although most learners managed to score, few managed to get full marks. Learners need to look carefully at the mark allocation - in this case 2 marks were being awarded for 4 items so it was important that they took care to get all of them correct.

It is hoped to introduce over time a range of ways that learners can answer questions to improve accessibility and to allow learners to exemplify their strengths.

Question 2(a)

This question was answered well (87.5% achieved full marks, nobody scored 0) and very few did not follow the rubric - this was pleasing as it had the potential for misinterpretation. The visual nature and large clear layout of the question possibly helped learners.

Question 2(b)

The responses were disappointing. Many answers were single word, short or generic answers. Specific animal characteristics were required that showed learners had learnt something about them. There was little attempt to match the location characteristic with the animal and it also lacked specifics or detail.

The number of lines available for an answer should be fully used - it provides a clue as to what the examiner expects.

Question 3(a)

The purpose of the design of Q3 was to provide learners with an exemplar of a working farm and based on the information provided make decisions about the future. It is important that learners read through a whole paper first, and that they read through the whole of each question again before attempting it.

Although there was some maths involved in this question it was at a very simple level and could be correctly answered by estimation - i.e. calculators were not necessary. This question asked learners to look critically at two sources - the visual presentation of the pie chart was in effect a distracter, and the learners who got this right looked beyond that and concentrated only on the numbers.

Question 3(b)

This proved difficult for most of the learners. The first point is that learners need to know the correct terminology - 'protected cropping' is specifically greenhouses, cloches, etc., and needs to be distinguished from 'crop protection' eg pesticides.

The second point is that the question specifically refers to **quality** and no marks were awarded for **quantity**. It is important therefore that centres prepare their learners at carefully reading the question and keeping their answers directed specifically at the question.

Question 3(c)

Produced some of the best responses at all levels. Learners made an attempt to fully answer and even where they wrote a list, it tended to contain a number of characteristics. The only issues that need pointing out is that as this is a Level 2 paper in most cases specifics rather than generalities are required, and that explanation is the key for higher mark allocations. Therefore the names of specific plant species were required, and that a list of characteristics rather than an explanation of **how** they were suitable would only achieve the lowest level mark.

Question 4(a)

Another question that produced full answers. Learners used the information available to help them answer which showed they were reading the paper, but also, encouragingly, many developed the information further with their own knowledge and views.

Question 4(b)

This question was designed to discriminate at the A/A* level but over 90% made a credit worthy attempt which reflected good preparation of learners. LO3 (p.222) is quite specific about management responsibilities. It is likely that with much media attention on animal rights, climate change and genetic modification that there is overemphasis on 'green' issues - to the exclusion of business and cultural responsibilities. A good quality answer would require learners discuss all of these rationally, their final decision being soundly evaluated.

Question 5(a) and 5(b)

Although it was not what was required, many learners gave high level answers for Q5(b) by describing the limitations of specific survey techniques. However Q5(a) which should have been the easier of the two, which was simply to describe a survey technique, was done comparatively poorly - while Q5(b) contained specific and detailed information, Q5(a) on the other hand was generic, general and thin.

Question 5(c)

Although answered adequately by most learners, responses were generally disappointing in that the question was designed to allow learners to select their strongest knowledge area and really show the examiner what they were capable of. Very few learners took this opportunity. It was hoped that this would engage the learners as a real world problem that they could solve. Unfortunately this was not the case - learners were vague about the conservation practice, or included a number of practices. They were very general about the benefits, which either were not clearly linked to any of the parties or to only one of them.

Question 6(a) and (b)

The response was similar to Q4(b). It was gratifying that learners were not put off by what was intended as demanding questions, and that they were able to articulate their views to quite a good level.

Summary

Learners have treated the more difficult questions more seriously and answered those more fully, while questions at the start which required writing rather than say ticking were poorly written in all terms - content, length, quality, grammar, legibility. However the more difficult questions are levels marked and however much effort a learner puts into an answer it is unlikely that the less academically-able will score highly. It is therefore important that centres concentrate on improving their learners lower level responses. This is especially true where this is the only external unit. Learners are succeeding in the vocational, practical units and it is important that they maximise their marks where they can in areas that they are less adept at.

Grade Boundaries

Level 2 Unit 5: Plants and Animals and their Role in Society

	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C
Raw boundary mark	50	45	37	29	22
Points Score	10	8	6	4	2

Notes

Maximum Mark (raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme or mark grids.

Raw boundary mark: the minimum mark required by a learner to qualify for a given grade.

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