



Pearson
Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2023

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In Geography (WGE02)
Unit 2: Geographical Investigations

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Introduction

This was the tenth sitting of WGE02 Geographical Investigations and whilst the entry remains relatively small, some of this year's entry still had a particularly challenging backdrop against the legacy of Covid-19. This continues, in some parts of the world, to affect patterns of learning as well as opportunities to collect first-hand primary fieldwork data.

As in previous years the fieldwork in Q3 this series remains somewhat mixed – but this to be expected for this particular group of learners given the likely opportunity cost of not being able to do much fieldwork in KS3 or GCSE. Once again, there is confusion around the stages in the enquiry sequence (particularly presentation and analysis) which is essential for a successful outcome in this exam. Those that focussed too much on describing the data collection rather than what the questions required, answers were as always, self-penalising. There were also some very good fieldwork answers which were judgemental and reflective (Q3d) but for this series these were very much in the minority.

The success of this “familiar” part of the fieldwork (all of Q3) really does depend on how suitable the fieldwork is that is set-up by the teachers and school itself. Centres are reminded to keep the fieldwork aims both **manageable** and **achievable**. It's simply too ambitious and unanswerable, e.g. those students who find themselves investigation the impacts of large-scale projects which are, as yet, incomplete. Centres would be well advised to review the manageability and appropriateness of their fieldwork, particularly whether it is actually possible to reach a realistic conclusion given the location, scale and data collection methods.

As in the previous series, most candidates managed to answer all questions on the examination paper and few ‘blanks’ were encountered. Those relatively new to teaching this part of the specification may be reminded:

- The paper totals to 60 marks and candidates are given 90 minutes to complete the paper.
- This exam paper consists of 5 questions, with the last two being paired options. In most cases each question is slightly ramped in demand with longer, cognitively higher questions at the end of each sub-section.
- Questions 1 and 2 test a mixture of AO1 and AO2 skills, whereas Question 3 (compulsory), 4 (Option 1) and 5 (Option 2) are based largely on fieldwork which is examined as an AO3 skill for this particular exam.
- Neither the Sample Assessment Materials nor the any of the live examination papers have ever used the command word ‘describe’. Candidates should be reminded that there are few marks for just descriptions, and description should be used as a means to an end i.e. leading to an explanation, not an end in itself.

OVERALL IMPRESSION

The overall impression given by examiners was that the paper has discriminated well between candidates and has proved accessible. However, examiners did provide some observations in terms of candidate performance which centres should be mindful in future preparation of candidates for this exam. These included:

- Breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of the unit specification varied considerably, even with this relatively small sample of candidates. There was variation especially in knowledge and understanding of the physical geography on Q1 with many lacking the terminology and confidence to deal especially with both Q1c. Once again, many also found it difficult to understand the command "examine", failing to recognise for example that other factors or processes can how the coastal systems operates.
- Although stimulus response material was provided some candidates are still not applying their knowledge accurately or relevantly. Many candidates still have problems in using evidence directly from the resource (an AO2 skill) in order to be able to generate a successful answer. Questions which use the command "State" e.g. 2(a)(i) are common at this point in the paper. Again "groups" is not always clear for some, instead resorting to generalised ideas around benefits.
- Some candidates had a poor knowledge and understanding of the fieldwork questions. In 3b the term "qualitative" was often confused with "quantitative". In Q3d especially there was a tendency to write generically around fieldwork and their data collection experiences, including some of the ways fieldwork was followed-up. Instead, they need to give explicit focus on the part of the enquiry pathway that is being examined – in this the links to the title or question. For this question, some failed to get into the L2 or L3 mark band as their answers were simply too basic and non-specific in terms of sampling design, equipment and / or place.
- In addition, there was often a lack of fluency and structure in the longer answers, many candidates just describing and explaining, rather than a focus on assessment or evaluation when appropriate. The AOs (Assessment Objectives) remain very important for this exam as in previous series.

QUESTION BY QUESTION FEEDBACK

Question 1 had a focus on the Crowded Coasts part of the specification (Topic 2.3.1 and 2.3.2). As in previous series, these questions are about responding to the resources which have been provided, i.e. a picture of coastal landforms. As recommended in previous exam feedback, rehearsing how to respond to photographs, data, diagrams and maps is an important skill to encourage prior to taking the exam, for example by using these resources as starters at the beginning of lessons. This will give confidence and competence allowing candidates to deal with features from a map, patterns, trends, anomalies as well as interpret photographic evidence. Q1a_{ii} was challenging for many. There were lots of answers referring to coastal erosion rather than weathering.

Q1c also presented a challenge for a number of candidates with a lack of clear understanding of the coastal system as a concept, and how sediment transport is linked to this. The AO2 is especially important in this question since other local factors will play a role, e.g. geology, fetch, topography etc. Only a minority of candidates attempted an "examination", i.e. some sort of evaluative assessment. Instead, many saw it more as a case-study question, in which case their answers ended up too descriptive, especially with listing the processes involved in longshore drift for example. Sediment transport was written about by many, but often lacking the terminology, more technical details as well as systems "overview" required to deliver an examination for L3.

Question 2, by comparison had a focus on the Urban Problems part of the specification (Topic 2.4.4). Again, this threw up some similar difficulties for some candidates as in Q1. The vast majority, however, were able to use the range of evidence in Figure 2 to identify possible problems linked to the photograph. Once again just stating "pollution" without any context will not be sufficient for credit as it's not explicitly linked to evidence taken from the resource (AO2).

Q2a_{ii} was generally also successful. Many candidates were able to correctly write a reasoned explanation linked to an NGO and some sort of change. On occasions, some candidates here provided far too much detail. These are not case-study questions, merely questions requiring a statement of explanation showing some development around the focus of the question.

In Q2b the answers were mixed with some candidates confused by the "groups" aspect, instead thinking it was more to do with writing just about how regeneration had happened. Whilst there may be some overlap, not all that was written was relevant. Clearly the word "different" requires more than one group to be considered. As in previous years, the best answers had 2, possibly 3, well-chosen urban places with a good level of detail, e.g. supporting evidence in the form of well-selected numerical data.

The problem for most, however, which acted as a barrier to L3, was that they failed to evaluate. Only a few students "took-on" the question by perhaps suggesting the benefits were limited to certain groups or that benefits varied from place to place and time to time. Or even that benefits

were difficult to measure and quantify. Examiners were not expecting too much writing on a comparative judgement, but it would have usefully been included in a short conclusion allowing access to L3. Even a well-considered single sentence, would have provided enough evidence for the evaluation.

Question 3 is always the compulsory fieldwork question, examining the fieldwork that the candidates has done themselves (the “familiar” fieldwork).

As in previous series, Q3a is usually rooted towards the start of the enquiry sequence. The majority of candidates were able to provide the right amount of detail about risk and its subsequent management. As before risks could include the fact that fieldwork data was not correctly collected, and therefore the “risk” was poor quality results.

Q3b was found to be confusing for many. Many wrote about a quantitative rather than qualitative technique. Fieldwork must be planned so that there is a clear distinction between the two approached and the mark scheme makes clear what is expected. Note that interviews with open questions are qualitative, but closed questions on questionnaires are quantitative. Some were also self-penalising in terms of not providing sufficient development of ideas, therefore getting only score 1 or 2 out of a possible maximum of 4. Others wrote about multiple techniques but only two could be credited in total.

Q3c demonstrated mixed successes since some were unclear as to the difference between primary and secondary data. Again, this shows the importance of a fieldwork glossary around the challenging terminology for learners. As part of the preparation for fieldwork, centres are encouraged to share the planning and decision-making process with students so that they understand both the “why” and the “how”, even if this is taught as a simulation or using virtual fieldwork. Centres should also reinforce the different stages provided in Appendix 2 of the specification. This help to contextualise the role of secondary data in this instance.

Q3d remains the longest question on this paper. As in previous series there were big challenges for some candidates, who still struggle with the command ‘evaluate’. Even at AS, this exam does expect a good understanding of both scientific method and fieldwork principles. Yet a lack of awareness of the route to enquiry was often troubling, especially in the context of success - reflecting on the outcomes against the original title / question. This was all too often evidenced by candidates describing the wrong part of the enquiry sequence. The focus for this question was both stage (3) and stage (7). For this question in particular, candidates are still finding it troublesome to evaluate, preferring instead to list and describe fieldwork techniques and events that they can remember. Remember that the AOs are rewarding for this evaluation and analysis skill, rather than the skill of (fieldwork) recall which is characterised by description. In Q3 the fieldwork questions cannot simply be describe, and candidates should be reminded of this when they develop their style of writing.

Questions 4 and 5. These are the final, parallel optional aspects of this paper, where candidates can either chose to answer coasts or urban-based

question. As in previous series, these were some of the most successful parts of the paper for many candidates, providing good answers that were detailed and specific and that matched the questions set.

As in previous series, Q4a and Q5a produced some excellent results from the majority, being able to make sense of the resources and recognising the links to the enquiry process.

Q4b and 5b were often low scoring as candidates found it difficult to write about a single disadvantage in any depth. There were a wide range of opportunities here including the challenges of GIS, or out of date information, but only a minority were able to provide higher-quality development to take the response up to the 3 marks available.

Q4ci-iii and Q5ci-iii were mostly successful showing how these number skills tested this series must have been practised allowing confidence in the exam. A minority of students however failed to accurately plot the data in the scatter graph.

4d and 5d again required double-development of a single idea / reasons. Whilst the majority could get an idea of picture for evidence (1 mark) few were able to convert that into a fully, more extended explanation. Again centres should refer to the published mark scheme for examples credit-worthy ideas.

