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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2023

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level

In Geography (WGE04)

Unit 4: Researching Geography

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## **The questions**

### OPTION 1: Tectonic Activity and Hazards

Evaluate the view that 'modifying the event' is *the most successful* method of managing tectonic hazards.

### OPTION 2: Feeding the World's People

Evaluate the view that intermediate and low-tech strategies to increase food supplies are *always more successful* than high-tech strategies.

### OPTION 3: Cultural Diversity: People and Landscapes .

'Global media corporations are the *most serious threat* to the survival of local and indigenous cultures.' Discuss.

### OPTION 4: Human Health and Disease

'TNCs are the *most important players* in the management of health risks.' Discuss.

## **Overview**

There was a small entry for this January examination and probably, as is usual, an unpredictable one given the size of the cohort. Some candidates will be those who have been entered early for this paper in their Year 13, as is usual, whilst others may have been looking to improve on their summer centre assessed grade. There were some unusual answers that, perhaps, suggest that some candidates were underprepared for the questions posed with no obvious evidence that they had been exposed to the mark scheme requirements for a report to be written, and not an essay. The most obvious example of this was the number of scripts that had no report structure whatsoever with answers written as seamless essays, lacking headings, references, or any other presentation of data other than prose. In every cohort there are a few of these but there was a significant increase in that minority on this occasion. Many of these essays also lacked any referencing of sources and whatever research had been carried out was only apparent by the material covered in the essay.

In this report feedback will be organised by the sections of the generic mark scheme rather than by chosen option. This should help focus on the strengths and weaknesses of all candidates. Please note that the keywords in the questions that should provide the focus of the report for the candidates are highlighted in the first section of this report.

### **Introduction (5 marks)**

In most cases the introduction can be, in part, pre-prepared by candidates given the amount of information offered by the pre-release steers. However, it is important to focus on 'in part' because although the pre-release information marks the broad outlines of the topic it does not of course identify the ultimate focus of the question to be answered. Thus, the most glaring aspect of the weaker responses was the omission of any meaningful deconstruction of the titles. As highlighted above, answers to the question posed for Option 1 needed to address not only what 'managing the event' might involve but also the titles contention that this is the most successful method of dealing with tectonic hazards 'disasters' amongst several. For Option 2 much the same was needed by way of deconstruction of the question; what exactly the differences between hi-tech and low-tech strategies are and how does one measure their relative 'success'. For Option 3 there should have been some discussion of how 'most serious threat' might be evaluated and this again needs some reference to other threats for any meaningful debate to take place. Finally, for Option 4, the evaluation of '(most) important players' was necessary. A useful litmus test when preparing candidates should be whether or not the question asked is obvious after reading their introduction. Sadly, that was not always the case.

### **Research (15 marks)**

The 'research' section offers an opportunity for candidates to gather marks despite possible weaknesses elsewhere. Even for those candidates who struggled to focus their answers in their introductions and, partly as a result of that struggled with both their analysis and conclusions, there are marks available for detailed and relevant 'case-study' based evidence. The selection of evidence is a very important part of this process, and centres would be well advised to conduct a quick audit of their 'go-to' case studies. It would be especially helpful if the selection served to challenge the multi-clichéd pre-conceptions that, for example, reinforced a view of global inequalities that maps against a developed/developing world dualism.

## **Analysis (20 marks)**

This was, for many candidates the least successful section of their report. In part that was a function of too narrow a research foundation but more often it was an inevitable consequence of a failure to address the key focus of the question asked. For Option 1 the most apparent oversight was a failure to explore how the success of management might be measured. Those who had prepared thoroughly, investigating the different methods of managing tectonic hazards disasters by evaluating how these worked were able to offer a view on what constitutes 'success' whereas those that had not focussed on that at all, could only describe the management methods without being able to evaluate their effectiveness. As is true for the other options without the focus having been clearly established in the introduction the tendency was to assert success rather than present a reasoned and argued case. For the other three topics the same issues of focus can be identified.

- Option 2 – addressing 'always' which is obviously contentious and hard to support
- Option 3 - identifying what is meant by 'most serious threat' and how that might be assessed
- Option 4 – identifying the other 'players' and coming to a view as to their relative role in management. In other words, are TNC's the 'most important'.

## **Conclusion and evaluation (15)**

It would be simplistic to overstress the truism that the amount of time and space devoted to this 15 mark section is often best described as 'disappointing'. Nonetheless, many are very brief, most are repeats of earlier comments and evaluation is often an expression of regret that more case-studies were not included, or more up-to-date data not included. It would help candidates enormously if they recalled the message that they will certainly have been told; to draw together the evidence and reflect on whether the central contention of the essay has been supported or otherwise. As with other sections mark scheme familiarity would be helpful. The litmus test of this section would obviously be a clarity over what question is being answered. Not all would pass this test. Those that did would also be well advised to read the final bullet point of the mark scheme with care and 'recognise the complexity of the question'. That would include a reflection on the partiality of the evidence and, perhaps most critically, the validity of the definitions of the key terms. In this spirit a reflection that magnitude of hazards might not increase but the magnitude of disasters might. That was a feature of the stronger responses. Similarly, a reflection on 'significance' or 'success' and how the evaluation of these might very well vary both from place to place and from time to time would have been very useful for those tackling Option 3 and Option 4. Very few did this in this unusual cohort. There are number of useful ideas that would be

invaluable for all candidates. For example, it is perfectly possible, indeed likely, that 'success' might be apparent in the short term but maybe not in the long term. It is also worth recalling that no management strategy is perfect – they all have costs and benefits. Money spent on one strategies money not spent on another. Adding complexities of this type is not just useful, but ultimately essential for candidates who aspire for the highest grades.

### **Quality of written communication (5)**

There were a number of very well presented and carefully organised reports but, regrettably, a few that did not reach the usual standard. The most common errors were either a failure to write a report at all or a lack of any obvious methodology in selecting evidence. References were often quite limited but also absent altogether from a minority of scripts.

### **Summary**

In common with almost all the January entries for this paper in the past, this cohort was unusual. There was some evidence of a strengthening at the top end , but disappointing number of very weak scripts that were not reports in the proper sense. However, some messages are not new or in any way specific. Of these the most important is the need for candidates to be sensitive to the difference between the information that they carry into the examination hall and how to deploy that information to answer the question that they will be asked. That is vital.

