



Pearson

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level in
Geography (WGE02)

Unit 2: Geographical Investigations

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General Introduction

The IAL AS Geographical Investigations is a new paper, first sat this summer. It is loosely based around the legacy Edexcel AS Unit 2 which was a highly established paper. Of particular significance in the legacy was the emphasis on converting a fieldwork experience into an answer which showed depth, detail and clear understanding of the stages of enquiry. This too has been carried through into this new qualification.

This exam paper consists of 5 questions, with the last two being paired options. In most cases each question has been tiered with longer, cognitively higher questions at the end of each section. The paper totals to 60 marks and candidates were given 90 minutes to complete the paper. 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. Question stems were designed to allow candidates to identify, describe, explain, evaluate and examine aspects of the unit specification, terms and concepts. There were a small number of marks allocated to performing mathematical procedures.

Overall impression

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

- Breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of the unit specification varied considerably. Some centres had prepared candidates well, but in many cases the level of knowledge and understanding is disappointing particularly regarding key theoretical concepts and particularly with respect to some of the more technical physical geography.
- Although stimulus response material was provided, many 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.
- Some candidates had a poor knowledge and understanding of the fieldwork questions, especially Q3d where they was a tendency to write “all I know” rather than giving a focus on design and data collection methodology. For this question, many failed to get into the 3-mark band as their answers were simply too generalised and non-specific.
- In addition, there was often a lack of fluency and structure in their longer answers, many candidates describing and explaining, rather than being more analytical as well as being repetitive in their answer.

Question by question feedback

Question 1 had a focus on the Crowded Coasts part of the specification (Topic 2.3). It was perhaps surprising to see the number of students who struggled to identify the coastal features presented in Q1ai. These questions will always be about responding to the resources which have been provided. Rehearsing how to respond to photographs, data and maps is an important skill to encourage before taking the exam (e.g. by using these resources as starters at the beginning of lessons), allowing candidates to deal with patterns, trends and anomalies. Q1aii was generally successfully dealt with by many, showing good understanding, whereas Q1b presented a challenge for many. It seemed for the majority there was a lack of clear understanding about geology as a concept and as a factor controlling landforms. Many also found it problematic to “examine” instead treating it as more of a case-study question, in which case their answers ended up too descriptive.

Question 2, instead had a focus on the Urban Problems part of the specification (Topic 2.4). Again, this threw up similar difficulties for some candidates as in Q1. Many struggled to give precise evidence from the resource of Dhaka, instead providing generalisations like “pollution” on its own, or giving stereotypical aspects of living developing world cities, when there was no evidence. In Q2b urban regeneration can cover a range of schemes and policies, but many candidates did push this concept rather too far towards examples that were poorly selected. The best answers had 2-3 well chosen schemes or places, with a good level of detail. Sustainable was often interpreted as simply ‘good’ and only relatively few candidates really focused on deeper sustainability analysis or assessment.

Question 3 was the compulsory fieldwork question, examining the fieldwork that the candidates had done themselves (“familiar” fieldwork). Q3a was generally fine, with evidence of an awareness of the need to manage risks of various types, including some methodological aspects. In Q3b however, a significant proportion of candidates did not understand the distinction between qualitative techniques and quantitative ones. Even though Examiners allowed questionnaires as qualitative, it was clear from many student responses that they were unfamiliar with these important fieldwork concepts. The quality of responses to Q3c was mixed with some very good answers at the top-end, showing a range of high quality sources which were linked to their fieldwork focus. Other were less coherent, instead describing the “internet” in vague terms and not managing to connect their secondary research to what their fieldwork was planning to do.

Q3d was the longest question on the paper. Examiners reported big problems for some candidates, who seemed to have no idea of what ‘evaluate the success’ meant in this context. Centres should offer a conceptual framework for this, perhaps based on aspects of internal and external validity associated with research processes as well as aspects of reliability. Whilst at AS this exam does not expect a deep understanding of the scientific method and principles, a lack of awareness of this was often troubling. It might be worth reminding candidates that success of the data collection process is not necessarily that it supports the hypothesis; the hypothesis may have been incorrect to start with and so successful data collection might allow rejection of the initial hypothesis and the development of a new and better one. That said, some were able

to identify that the data collected matched and reflected wider secondary data and hence appeared to be valid which was a reasonable evaluation. In other answers, there was evidence that candidates were writing what appeared to be pre-rehearsed responses, which in many instances were not specifically answering the question set.

Questions 4 and 5. These are the parallel optional aspects of this paper, where students can either chose to answer coasts or an urban-based question. In many respects, these were the most successful parts of the paper for many candidates, providing good answers that were specific and that matched the questions set. However, Q4aiii and Q5aiii were difficult for many as the detail bar is set a little high with the 3-mark explain one reason which requires good development.