



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level in
Geography (WGE03)
Paper 01 Contested Planet

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Question 1

This question required candidates to suggest reasons for three linked, but distinct trends shown across a set of graphical data: the rising number of tropical cyclones over time, the increasing number of people affected globally, and the decreasing number of people killed by tropical cyclones.

Overall, this question was well answered. Many candidates were able to engage with all three data trends and offer broadly accurate explanations, although the level of development and precision in their responses varied significantly.

A common feature of many weaker responses was a tendency to begin with a lengthy or general description of the trends, often focusing unnecessarily on specific years or fluctuations in the data. This was not required by the question and did not attract credit. In some cases, candidates misinterpreted the question entirely, choosing instead to explore correlations or relationships between the three graphs, rather than offering separate causal explanations for each.

A recurring issue across mid- and lower-tier responses was the use of vague or undeveloped statements, such as attributing the rise in tropical cyclones simply to climate change or the increase in people affected to population growth, without further elaboration. While such ideas are broadly correct, they require specific development and geographical reasoning to access the higher mark bands. For example, stronger responses recognised how global warming can expand the area affected by tropical cyclones, extend the cyclone season, or intensify storm surge impacts through rising sea levels and warmer sea surface temperatures. Others correctly linked population growth with increased coastal urbanisation, particularly in developing and emerging countries, leading to more people being exposed to cyclone hazards.

The best responses also addressed the falling number of fatalities with reference to improvements in forecasting, early warning systems, evacuation procedures, and disaster preparedness, particularly in countries that have historically been vulnerable to tropical cyclones.

In conclusion, while many candidates demonstrated a good general understanding of the topic, the strongest responses combined this with clear, focused analysis and the ability to apply geographical knowledge to interpret the figure effectively. Future candidates would benefit from careful attention to question wording — particularly when asked to "suggest reasons" — and from practising how to move beyond simple trend description to develop explanatory responses grounded in geographical understanding.

Question 2a

This question required candidates to suggest reasons for the uncertainty surrounding future biodiversity levels, based on a graph showing three potential future scenarios. The focus of the question was clearly on why biodiversity levels are uncertain, rather than on describing or explaining the individual scenarios presented.

While some candidates approached the question with a good degree of understanding, many responses drifted away from the precise demands of the question. A common issue was the tendency to describe the three lines or pathways shown on the graph in detail, rather than analysing the underlying causes of uncertainty. This often resulted in narrative-style responses

that outlined what might happen in each scenario, rather than why there is uncertainty about which pathway the future will follow.

A number of candidates appeared to interpret the question as an opportunity to explain why each of the scenarios could occur, effectively answering a different question. While such responses often demonstrated secure knowledge of environmental issues, they failed to directly address the concept of uncertainty and, therefore, could not access the higher mark bands.

Better performing candidates kept a clear focus on the reasons for uncertainty and showed awareness of key geographical factors such as the unpredictable impacts of climate change, future patterns of population growth, and levels of global consumption. These responses also explored the uncertainty surrounding political will, international cooperation, and the extent to which environmental protection measures might be implemented or enforced in the future. The role of policy decisions, technological developments, and socio-economic priorities were often cited as contributing to the lack of clarity over which biodiversity pathway the world is most likely to follow.

As seen in responses to other questions on the paper, there was a tendency in some answers to concentrate too heavily on carbon emissions or CO₂ reduction. While these issues are related to biodiversity loss through the impacts of climate change, many responses lacked direct reference to ecosystems, habitat degradation, or species loss, and so did not engage fully with the specific concept of biodiversity.

In summary, the question was accessible to most candidates, but success was dependent on a clear focus on the reasons for uncertainty, rather than simply describing potential outcomes. The strongest responses demonstrated a secure grasp of the interrelated drivers of environmental change, and were able to evaluate how their unpredictability leads to divergent biodiversity futures. Future candidates are encouraged to read questions carefully, avoid overly descriptive answers, and ensure that they maintain focus on the central theme of uncertainty when it is specified in the question wording.

Q2b

This question required candidates to demonstrate a clear understanding of the various players involved in biodiversity management and to assess their relative importance at both local and global scales. The strongest responses were able to differentiate between local and global players, provide detailed examples, and offer a critical assessment of their roles in effective biodiversity conservation.

However, a significant number of candidates misinterpreted the focus of the question. Some responses, even at the middle and upper mark ranges, placed excessive emphasis on climate change, detailing the outcomes of COP meetings and the work of *the* Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). While there is some intersection between climate change and biodiversity loss, it must be stressed that biodiversity management and climate change mitigation are distinct areas of environmental policy. Such misdirected focus limited the relevance and depth of the argument in relation to the specific question asked.

At the lower end of the ability range, many responses remained vague and generic, often lacking the necessary depth of place-based knowledge and example use. These candidates tended to make general assertions about “governments” or “organisations helping the environment” without naming or explaining the specific roles of players such as NGOs (e.g.

WWF), local communities, national governments, *or* global institutions like the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity). As a result, these responses remained descriptive rather than analytical and did not meet the criteria for higher levels of the mark scheme.

More successful responses included specific and relevant case studies, such as:

- The role of the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets at a global scale.
- The involvement of national governments, for example, Costa Rica's national reforestation policies or UK conservation strategies such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).
- The impact of non-governmental organisations (e.g. WWF, Conservation International) in both international lobbying and local-scale project delivery.
- Local community management, such as community forest management in Nepal *or* ecotourism initiatives in Madagascar.

High level answers not only named these players but also evaluated their effectiveness, for instance by comparing top-down government legislation with bottom-up community initiatives, and discussing challenges such as enforcement, funding, and political will. These candidates demonstrated a conceptual understanding of the multi-scalar nature of biodiversity management and were able to construct balanced arguments with clear judgements.

Q3

This synoptic question gave candidates the opportunity to draw together ideas from across the specification, particularly from topics covering globalisation, environmental degradation, and international governance. Overall, it was a question that was generally answered well. Most candidates were able to present both sides of the argument, acknowledging that while globalisation can play a role in uniting people to solve environmental problems such as pollution and global warming, it is also a major driver of those problems in the first place.

A clear strength in many responses was their balanced structure. Most candidates managed to explore how globalisation contributes to environmental challenges through increased industrialisation, transportation, and consumer demand while also discussing how it can promote international cooperation, awareness, and innovation. Stronger responses did not just reserve their judgement for the conclusion but evaluated throughout, weighing the extent to which globalisation is a unifying force or a destructive one. These responses often concluded with a clear stance on the question, supported by evidence and critical analysis.

One of the more convincing angles explored by higher-level candidates was the role of global media and, increasingly, social media. These were often cited as tools that allow individuals and organisations to spread awareness of environmental threats quickly and widely, contributing to collective pressure for action. Campaigns surrounding climate strikes, plastic pollution, or carbon emissions were well used as examples, with some responses referring to figures such as Greta Thunberg or movements like Fridays for Future as examples of how globalisation enables environmental activism to transcend national boundaries.

However, there was generally less depth when it came to global environmental agreements or summits. While many students mentioned events such as COP meetings or agreements like the Paris Climate Accord, these were often only referenced briefly and sometimes inaccurately. There was little exploration of how these agreements function, what barriers they face, or how effective they have been in practice. Too often, responses made assertions that

globalisation had made such agreements easier without clearly explaining the mechanisms such as increased diplomatic links, economic interdependence, or technological advancements that have facilitated global cooperation.

Most candidates were more comfortable discussing how globalisation continues to drive environmental damage than how it might help to reduce it. A common theme was the critical role of transnational corporations (TNCs), which were usually portrayed negatively. Responses often described how TNCs contribute to pollution, resource exploitation, and deforestation, and there was a tendency to conflate economic expansion with environmental decline. While this perspective is valid, a number of candidates failed to explore the complexity of the role TNCs play, with some either overgeneralising their impact or unconvincingly arguing that they help to reduce environmental harm, often without evidence. Some weaker responses strayed into discussions about biodiversity management, which, while related, was not the focus of the question.

Another common shortcoming was the vague use of language, with some candidates writing that “globalisation has done this” without explaining how or why. These assertions lacked the necessary cause-and-effect reasoning and weakened the overall argument. In contrast, stronger responses explained, for example, how global trade and technological networks might enable faster responses to environmental disasters, the spread of green technology, or shared standards for emissions reporting.

Use of examples was a key discriminator. High-level responses drew on a range of relevant and contemporary examples, such as companies committing to net-zero targets, the diffusion of electric vehicle technology, or collaborative global responses to crises like deforestation. In contrast, lower-level responses relied on vague or generic statements, often unsupported by place-specific detail or current evidence.

In summary, this was a question that enabled many candidates to demonstrate good synoptic thinking. The highest level responses featured ongoing evaluation, a balanced approach, and clear use of contemporary examples, while also acknowledging the inherent tensions between the economic drivers of globalisation and the cooperative efforts required to solve environmental problems.

Q4a

This question tested candidates’ ability to interpret a landscape image and apply their knowledge of renewable energy sources to specific physical features. The landscape presented included several clear indicators of renewable energy potential: large open spaces suitable for wind turbines or solar panels, and a river descending the side of a mountainous area, which suggested hydroelectric potential.

Overall, most candidates recognised the need to identify appropriate forms of renewable energy and link these clearly to features in the landscape. Better responses focused explicitly on how the physical features visible in the image could be harnessed for energy production, while less successful answers tended to stray into generalised or irrelevant discussions.

Stronger responses identified multiple types of renewable energy appropriate to the landscape. Many candidates correctly noted that the open land could support large-scale solar farms, citing the need for unobstructed sunlight and available space for photovoltaic panels. Others explained how wind turbines could be situated either on the exposed mountainous

ridges where wind speeds are typically higher or in nearby offshore areas, which some inferred from the landscape or its geographical context.

Another commonly credited point was the identification of the river as a potential source for hydroelectric power (HEP). High-performing candidates explained how the gradient of the river could be used for run-of-river schemes or small-scale hydroelectric installations, linking the steep descent of the watercourse to gravitational energy and turbine generation.

Weaker responses fell into two main categories. Firstly, some candidates simply listed types of renewable energy without linking them to features in the image, limiting their access to higher marks. Secondly, a number of responses referred to non-renewable sources such as nuclear power, biofuels, or fossil fuels, which were not creditworthy under the terms of the question. These answers often showed confusion around what constitutes renewable energy, or lacked attention to the command word “explain,” failing to develop their points.

In summary, high-mark responses were those that explicitly referenced the landscape features shown and clearly connected them to relevant renewable energy sources. These candidates used accurate geographical terminology and demonstrated an understanding of how physical geography supports energy production. To improve, candidates should ensure they fully understand the definition of renewable energy and focus on developing points that relate directly to features observable in the resource.

Q4b

This question invited candidates to evaluate the effectiveness of biofuels within the context of carbon neutrality and energy transition. However, despite the accessibility of the topic, many responses revealed conceptual misunderstandings and limited depth of knowledge, particularly regarding what constitutes a biofuel and what is meant by carbon neutral.

A key weakness across many scripts was a superficial or incorrect understanding of the term carbon neutral. Few candidates explicitly defined or explained it in relation to biofuels. Stronger responses clarified that carbon neutrality, in this context, refers to the idea that the carbon dioxide absorbed by crops during growth offsets the emissions released when the fuel is burned. This understanding was essential for properly assessing the viability of biofuels, but it was too often overlooked or incorrectly explained.

Another significant issue was confusion between biofuels and biomass. Some candidates wrote at length about burning wood, crop waste, or organic matter, conflating this with the use of biofuels. While both are renewable energy sources, the question specifically asked about biofuels—such as bioethanol and biodiesel—which are refined liquid fuels primarily derived from crops like maize, sugarcane, or palm oil. Responses that focused solely on domestic biomass use did not address the demands of the question and struggled to access the higher mark bands.

Surprisingly, some candidates demonstrated a lack of clarity around the nature of biofuels themselves. In some cases, biofuels were mistakenly described as a type of fossil fuel or confused with liquefied natural gas which is non-renewable. There was also little awareness of the scale at which biofuels are produced globally, particularly in countries such as Brazil and the USA, or their widespread use in transportation, especially as blending agents in petrol or diesel.

Stronger responses used accurate, named examples such as Brazil's sugarcane ethanol programme, which was often cited as a success story due to its relatively low carbon emissions and contribution to national energy security. Similarly, the use of maize-based bioethanol in the USA was sometimes discussed, although better answers evaluated the sustainability and food security trade-offs associated with first-generation biofuels. A small number of candidates made insightful points about second-generation biofuels derived from waste materials or non-food crops and assessed how these might overcome some of the limitations of earlier biofuel technologies.

Weaker responses also suffered from digressions into unrelated topics. For example, several candidates discussed carbon capture and storage (CCS) or electric vehicles in detail. These may be relevant in a broader discussion on reducing emissions, but they do not directly answer the question, which focused on energy generation alternatives to fossil fuels. Electric vehicles were sometimes incorrectly presented as a form of energy production, rather than as energy users—highlighting confusion around the structure of energy systems.

In terms of structure, many candidates provided both advantages and disadvantages of biofuels and compared them with other alternatives such as solar, wind, or hydrogen power. The best answers then weighed this evidence with clear reasoning to assess how far biofuels might be considered the best carbon neutral alternative. This evaluative component, along with a clear conclusion, distinguished responses in the higher levels of the mark scheme.

In summary, this question revealed some gaps in candidate understanding of key terminology and concepts, particularly the distinction between biofuels and other renewables, and the meaning of carbon neutrality. Stronger responses remained focused on biofuels, used accurate examples, evaluated both environmental and economic aspects, and compared biofuels with other low-carbon alternatives. To improve, centres should ensure students have a firm grasp of definitions and are equipped to critically evaluate renewable energy strategies within the framework of energy security, sustainability, and climate goals.

Q5a

Most candidates approached this question with a reasonable understanding of the basic processes of the hydrological cycle, although the depth and breadth of explanation varied considerably.

Many candidates correctly used the ocean as the starting point for their answer, often identifying evaporation as the initial stage in the cycling of water. This was commonly followed by a reference to condensation and cloud formation, with precipitation completing the upper-atmosphere processes. These basic stages were frequently mentioned, although in some responses they were described in overly simplistic or generalised terms. Nonetheless, they provided a valid foundation for gaining credit.

Stronger responses went beyond this and linked the precipitation to the mountainous topography shown in the image. These candidates were able to refer to the process of orographic rainfall, correctly identifying how moist air is forced to rise over the mountains, cools, and condenses to form precipitation. This demonstrated a sound understanding of how the physical landscape can influence the movement of water within the cycle.

Following precipitation, better answers traced the journey of water as it returned to the sea, often detailing several key processes. Many recognised surface runoff as a primary route, while more developed answers referenced infiltration into the soil, leading to throughflow and

groundwater flow. Some candidates also acknowledged that river discharge contributes significantly to the return flow to the ocean, closing the loop of the hydrological cycle.

An additional strength seen in higher-scoring responses was the recognition of water storage in the form of ice on the mountain tops. Where this was identified, candidates sometimes developed their explanation to include the process of snowmelt or ice melt, particularly during warmer periods, and its contribution to river flow and eventual discharge into the sea. This dimension added further sophistication to the response, reflecting a more synoptic understanding of seasonal or climatic influences on the cycle.

In contrast, lower-level responses tended to list processes without linking them clearly to features in the landscape. Some candidates omitted significant components of the cycle, such as infiltration or groundwater flow, or failed to connect the processes back to the physical features shown in the image. A few responses drifted into general hydrological theory without applying it to the specific landscape, which limited the marks available.

Q5b

This extended response question was generally well understood and produced a wide range of responses. Most candidates demonstrated a sound grasp of what desalination is and how it operates as a response to water insecurity. Unlike the confusion observed in some responses to Question 4b on biofuels, desalination as a process was more clearly and consistently explained.

Many candidates were able to outline the basic mechanics of desalination - the removal of salt from seawater to produce fresh water and some discussed the two main methods: thermal distillation and reverse osmosis. In stronger responses, candidates went on to assess the economic and environmental implications of desalination. They commonly noted its high energy demands, the associated carbon emissions, and the issues surrounding brine disposal. Conversely, the benefits, particularly its reliability in arid or water-scarce regions were often well recognised.

There was a reasonable range of place-based examples, with Singapore, Israel, and Saudi Arabia being the most frequently cited. These were used with varying degrees of success. In higher-level responses, these examples were developed to support evaluative points, such as Singapore's integration of desalination into a broader, multi-pronged water management strategy (the "Four National Taps" approach). This allowed candidates to introduce comparisons between desalination and alternative solutions, adding depth to their assessments.

However, a common limitation was the narrow focus on desalination alone. Many responses became case studies in the pros and cons of desalination, without broader consideration of what might constitute the "best" solution to water insecurity. This restricted the ability of candidates to access the higher levels of the mark scheme, which require comparative judgement and evaluation. Some missed the opportunity to explore more sustainable or context-appropriate alternatives, such as rainwater harvesting, greywater recycling, improved irrigation techniques, or behaviour-based water conservation strategies.

The most successful responses made these comparisons explicitly. They discussed how intermediate and lower-cost technologies might be more viable in less economically developed contexts, especially where the infrastructure or energy capacity needed for desalination is lacking. Some candidates rightly questioned the long-term sustainability of desalination,

especially in countries relying on fossil fuels to power plants and contrasted this with conservation-led approaches that tackle demand rather than just supply.

A few candidates also made the perceptive point that while desalination offers a reliable, climate-independent source of water, its suitability varies greatly depending on the country's economic capacity, coastline access, and environmental regulation. Such nuance helped elevate these responses into the top level, particularly where it was supported by effective use of named examples and a clear, reasoned conclusion.

In summary, this question was generally well answered, with most candidates demonstrating at least a basic understanding of desalination and its role in addressing water insecurity. The strongest responses stood out because they moved beyond a narrow discussion of desalination alone, introduced alternative strategies, and critically assessed their relative merits in a range of development and environmental contexts.

Q6

This 20-mark synoptic essay question required candidates to explore the extent to which economic and political influence, exerted respectively through TNCs and IGOs, contributes to the status of global superpowers. While many candidates demonstrated a strong grasp of the role of TNCs, responses were generally less assured when discussing IGOs, and in some cases revealed significant conceptual misunderstandings.

TNCs were typically well understood. Most candidates recognised their importance in projecting economic power through mechanisms such as foreign direct investment (FDI), control over global supply chains, and their contributions to GDP and tax revenue. Some responses also included insightful comments on the soft power dimension of TNCs particularly in relation to cultural globalisation and brand influence, citing examples such as Apple, McDonald's, or Google. Candidates often used these examples effectively to show how TNCs are not only economic actors but also instruments of geopolitical influence, shaping consumption patterns and cultural values on a global scale.

However, the political dimension of superpower status, particularly through IGOs, was less confidently handled. While some candidates successfully discussed the role of key institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the G7/G20, others showed confusion about what IGOs are. For instance, some responses conflated IGOs with NGOs or even incorrectly described state-led initiatives like China's Belt and Road Initiative as IGOs. This lack of clarity limited the analytical depth of such responses and often resulted in a weaker comparative argument.

A common pattern across scripts was an imbalance in coverage: many candidates produced well-developed paragraphs on TNCs but then offered a much thinner discussion of IGOs, sometimes lacking specific examples or merely listing organisations without exploring how they function to sustain or extend superpower influence. This created structurally lopsided answers, which prevented some otherwise strong candidates from reaching the higher levels of the mark scheme.

Some of the most successful answers drew on the 'pillars of superpower status' framework (economic, military, political, and cultural power) to contextualise the roles of TNCs and IGOs within a broader set of factors. These responses used the prompt as a starting point but then developed their arguments by comparing TNCs and IGOs with other dimensions of power such as military capabilities, natural resource endowment, demographic strength, or technological

innovation. In doing so, they delivered more nuanced and evaluative answers, making reasoned judgements about the relative importance of each factor in historical and contemporary contexts.

A minority of candidates became distracted by discussions of recent events such as US-China trade wars or Donald Trump's tariff policies. While topicality can be valuable, it requires confident handling, and in this case, many candidates struggled to accurately explain the mechanics or implications of these developments. Their inclusion often introduced confusion rather than clarity, and in some cases revealed a surface-level understanding of geopolitics and trade diplomacy. This issue also emerged in Question 7, where trade dynamics were discussed without a strong grasp of underlying processes.

In terms of structure, higher-level responses were clearly organised, addressed both elements of the question (TNCs and IGOs), and consistently returned to the command word "to what extent" with evaluative language and reasoned conclusions. Weaker responses often lacked this balance or drifted into descriptive accounts of TNCs and IGOs without assessing their role in conferring superpower status.

In summary, this question produced a broad range of responses, with many candidates showing strong understanding of TNCs and their multifaceted role in shaping global influence. However, a recurring weakness was the misinterpretation or underdevelopment of IGOs, which limited the comparative assessment needed to access higher marks. Stronger candidates drew on a wider range of geopolitical knowledge, deployed accurate examples, and built sustained evaluative arguments around the different dimensions of superpower status.

Q7

This question was a less popular choice among candidates compared to Question 6, but those who did attempt it generally produced competent and structured responses. Most candidates were able to engage with the two named factors - trade and governance and made some attempt to assess their roles in explaining global disparities in development progress. However, the quality and depth of explanation varied considerably across scripts.

Governance was typically the better understood of the two key terms. Candidates often cited the example of Haiti to show how weak institutions, poor political leadership, and corruption can hinder development. In many cases, this was effectively contrasted with more successful examples, such as Botswana or Rwanda, where improvements in governance have contributed to development gains. These responses demonstrated a clear understanding that good governance can enable effective use of aid, more efficient public services, and improved social outcomes.

By contrast, trade was less confidently handled. While some candidates correctly identified how trade can drive economic growth through export earnings and job creation, others tended to offer vague or overly generic statements. A few responses strayed off-topic by focusing heavily on recent political developments, such as the US-China trade war under President Trump. While topical examples can be relevant, in many cases this discussion lacked precision and became a distraction from the question's focus on long-term development progress. Additionally, some candidates focused primarily on already developed countries—such as South Korea, Japan, or the USA which limited their ability to effectively engage with the development gap and the reasons why some countries have progressed more slowly than others.

Only a minority of candidates explored the potential interrelationship between governance and trade an area where higher-level responses were able to distinguish themselves. For instance, stronger answers considered how effective governance might help a country negotiate more favourable trade deals or better manage the domestic impacts of global trade, whereas weak governance can exacerbate exploitation and dependency on primary exports. These connections added depth and sophistication to the analysis.

Roughly a third of responses introduced other explanatory factors beyond trade and governance, such as the impact of aid, debt relief, geographical location, or historical colonialism. Where these were well-integrated into the argument and not treated as standalone digressions, they often helped candidates to produce more balanced and comparative conclusions. These broader perspectives allowed candidates to weigh up multiple influences on development progress and gave them a stronger platform from which to assess the relative importance of trade and governance.

Structurally, most candidates organised their responses in a logical way, addressing each of the two named factors in turn before offering some form of judgement. The best answers evaluated these factors in relation to others, supported their points with specific examples, and returned to the question throughout, using evaluative language such as "more significant," "to a lesser extent," or "this depends on..."

In conclusion, while governance was generally explained and exemplified effectively, trade was often less well-developed, with some candidates losing focus or lacking the depth of knowledge needed to make compelling arguments. Those who were able to compare and evaluate multiple factors produced the most convincing answers and reached the higher levels of the mark scheme.

Advice for future candidates:

- Read the question carefully and ensure responses remain **relevant to the specific topic** – in this case, biodiversity, not climate change.
- Develop a strong bank of **detailed, place-based case studies** at both local and global scales.
- Practice **evaluating and comparing** the roles of different players, not just describing them.
- Use the **language of assessment** throughout (e.g., "more important because", "less effective due to", "however, this is limited by...").

