Pearson Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE in Geography (4WGE1)
Unit 1 Physical Geography

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Introduction

There was a much smaller entry for this examination series than the linear qualification, most likely due to it only being the second summer series for this qualification, although there was a much larger entry size than the 2406 entry numbers.

This Examiner's report is intended to provide an insight into performance on Paper 1 Physical Geography, in particular, analysing the majority of questions in terms of what went well and where common mistakes and underperformance were evident.

This paper consists of two sections from which candidates answer two 25-mark questions from Section A and one 20-mark question from Section B, the total marks on the paper are 70.

The exam includes multiple-choice questions, short, open response, calculations and extended response questions. The exam command words which are used in the paper are defined in the specification. Each of the questions is mapped to one or more of the Assessment Objectives (AOs).

In section A River environments, Coastal environments and Hazardous environments are covered. Candidates are required to select two out of three questions.

In section B candidates choose one out of three fieldwork related questions relating to river environments, coastal environments and hazardous environments.

It is important that candidates focus on the requirements for each command word and the Assessment Objective (AO) distribution, particularly for the longer response 8-mark questions, to ensure they access the full range of marks available.

Summary

Areas for focus for next series.

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Ensure candidates make specific reference to the resource shown for 4-mark questions in

  Section A.

- Candidates need to be confident in evaluating different stages in the geographical enquiry process not just fieldwork methods.
- Candidates need to be aware of the difference between data presentation and data collection methods.
- Candidates need to be able to explain why a particular data presentation technique is appropriate for the data being presented.
- When answering the 8-mark longer response questions candidates need to be clear on the demands of the command word 'analyse'. This requires candidates to investigate an issue by breaking it down into different components and making logical, evidence-based connections between these components. There is an

expectation that judgement is made, although, this does not need to be in the form of an evaluation statement at the end of the response.

- Candidates need to recognise that the longer response 8-mark question is dominated by the AO distribution (4 marks for AO3 and 4 marks for AO4). Therefore, responses that are unbalanced or focus on one AO will be limited to a Level 1 response.
- Candidates who just lift text directly from a resource will not gain credit.
- In questions where candidates are asked to develop a single reason, it is important to ensure that the appropriate number of links in the explanatory chain are developed. The number of marks should be used as a guide. These questions usually have the command word, 'suggest' or 'explain', but may differ in depth depending on the expectation of the question.
- Candidates need to ensure they complete the correct fieldwork question; there were a number of candidates answering questions based on a coasts enquiry in both the river and hazard enquiry questions. This limited responses as marks could only be awarded for generic ideas plausible for the enquiry context being answered.
- Some candidates do not follow the instructions on the front of the exam paper and attempt to answer all questions which often results in the candidate running out of time. It would be useful to spend time with candidates to ensure they are familiar with the structure of the paper to avoid rubric infringements.

Question feedback

Section A

Question 1

1(a) This MCQ was an accessible start to the question with a significant majority of candidates being able to identify the definition of altitude.

1(b)(i) This MCQ was an accessible start to the question with a significant majority of candidates being able to identify a cause of water stress.

1(b)(ii) Candidates accessed this question well and were able to state one type of river transport. On occasion some candidates named a type of river erosion process

1(c) A significant proportion of candidates were able to achieve 2 marks on this question, however, on occasion some responses merely described a type of river flood prevention strategy rather than explain how it reduces the risk of flooding.

1(d) This question required candidates to use a resource (Figure 1a) showing a diagram of causes of variation in water quality. The first mark was awarded for identification of a relevant piece of evidence, which went beyond simply direct lifting from the resource, with the second mark awarded for the impact this may have on the water quality.

A large proportion of candidates were able to achieve 4 marks; the most common responses were focused on the impact of fertilisers and sewage on water quality.

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1(e) The vast majority of candidates achieved the mark for this question; a few candidates stated a water store.

1(f) This question required candidates to identify a correct lowland river landform and provide a basic explanation of its formation. In previous examination series there have been explain the formation of 'floodplains' as 4-mark questions. There is now the requirement for more scaffold in these types of 4mark questions and therefore, there was no requirement for the full sequence of landform formation to be explained. There just needed to be an accurate step in the landform formation explained for the second mark to be awarded.

Where candidates did not achieve full marks, this was usually because they had written about an upland river landform which was not the focus of this question.

1(g) For this question candidates were required to explain one reason for the rising demand for water. It is often these 3-mark questions which students find most demanding as they often find it challenging developing one point in sufficient depth to be awarded 3-marks. Some candidates found it challenging to gain the third mark as the question stem had already stated the demand had increased and so no mark was awarded for simply stating demand had risen/increased/grown.

1(h) These 8-mark extended writing questions candidates are required to blend their use of the resource (AO4) with their own knowledge and understanding of the issue presented (AO3), therefore they are not case study questions, rather they require the candidates to apply their geographical understanding to the context shown in the resource.

Many candidates clearly used the resource to describe the differences in discharge between the two river regimes and used the information in the textboxes to explain the reasons for the differences.

Some candidates used the information from the resource and made clear links to the cause for the difference in river regime going beyond simply describing differences for the hydrograph. This was pleasing as historically candidates have found it challenging to explain river regimes and not simply storm hydrographs. Some candidates were also able to make links to the difference in latitude and the influence this has on climate.

To access the higher marks candidates needed to go beyond simply describing what is shown in the resources but provide several clear developed reasons for the differences in the river regimes shown.

The command word 'analyse' needs to be addressed to achieve full marks and often candidates found this demanding as there was often minimal judgement demonstrated in candidate responses.

Question 2

2(a) This MCQ was an accessible start to the question with a significant majority of candidates being able to identify one way to prevent buildings being flooded.

2(b)(i) This MCQ was an accessible start to the question with a significant majority of candidates being able to identify the best definition of sea level change.

2(b)(ii) In this question candidates were required to state one cause of coastal flooding. Most candidates were awarded the mark for this question with the most common responses being storm surge or tsunami.

2(b)(iii) In this question candidates were required to explain one type of hard engineering used in coastal management. Generally, this question was answered well by candidates, there have a clear understanding of what hard engineering strategies are and most can explain how they work to reduce erosion and/or flooding. Where candidates were not awarded full marks this was usually because they simply describe a type of hard engineering rather than explaining how it works. On rare occasions some candidates identified a soft engineering strategy and were not awarded credit.

2(c) This question required candidates to use a resource, Figure 2a, showing an aerial photograph before and after soft engineering had been established. The first mark was awarded for identifying a feature shown on the resource that could cause conflict, and the second mark was awarded for the development of this point. Candidates generally engaged with the resource well and identified a feature which would be likely to cause conflict. Many candidates identified specific key groups who would be at conflict (which was not required for this question to gain credit, as no key groups were shown/implied from the resource) demonstrated their secure understanding of conflict in coastal environments.

Where candidates did not gain full marks, this was most often due to not having identified a conflict based on evidence shown in the resource. In a minority of responses, the candidates had misinterpreted the resource as though the after image was the before image and stated the sand dunes had been destroyed and this would be a source of conflict which was an incorrect interpretation for the resource.

2(d) For this question candidates were required to explain one reason for the distribution of coral reef ecosystems. It is often these 3-mark questions which students find most demanding as they often find it challenging developing one point in sufficient depth to be awarded 3-marks. Most candidates were able to gain at least 2-marks by identifying the temperature required and link this to their location be found between the Tropics. Fewer candidates were awarded the third mark which required further explanation. Where the

third mark was awarded this was most often for the explanation of the reason coral reefs are distributed in shallow water (needing access to sunlight to photosynthesise).

2(e) The majority of students correctly identified an abiotic characteristic shown on the resource. A few candidates identified a biotic characteristic, historically questions focusing on abiotic characteristics have been a challenge for candidates, but this was not the case this series. Very occasionally candidate identified an abiotic factor not shown in the resource and were not awarded credit.

2(f) This item required candidates to explain one industrial and one agricultural threat to a coastal ecosystem. Generally, this question was answered well by candidates and although 'such as salt marshes' was stated in the question responses about any coastal ecosystem were credited. The most common responses were toxic chemicals and fertilisers. Some candidates found it challenging to develop their initial point, for example some stated an industrial and agricultural threat but did not go on to explain the impact of this threat on the ecosystem. Other candidates stated the impact of the threat e.g. reduces biodiversity but did not identify a specific industrial/agricultural threat. This question required candidates to go beyond just stating industry/factories/agriculture/farming as the threat as this was provided for them on the question paper, a more specific threat was required to gain credit.

2(g) These 8-mark extended writing questions candidates are required to blend their use of the resource (AO4) with their own knowledge and understanding of the issue presented (AO3), therefore they are not case study questions, rather they require the candidates to apply their geographical understanding to the context shown in the resource.

In this instance candidates were required to study Figure 2c, a topographical map, photograph and fact file of a coastal location in France.

Some candidates used the information from the resource and made links to the relevant physical processes responsible for the landforms shown along the stretch of coastline. Candidates understanding of physical processes, particularly erosion/transport/deposition is strong, and many were able to link these to the information provided in the resource. A number of candidates were also able to accurately discuss the role of the correct, sub-aerial processes involved in the formation of the coastal landscape shown.

The command word 'analyse' needs to be addressed to achieve full marks, a proportion of candidates demonstrated making a simplistic judgement, but fewer demonstrated the analyse required to reach Level 3.

Question 3

3(a) This MCQ was an accessible start to the question with a significant majority of candidates being able to identify the statement that best describes a destructive/convergent plate boundary.

3(b)(i) This MCQ was an accessible start to the question with a significant majority of candidates being able to identify a feature of a volcano.

3(b)(ii) In this question candidates were required to state one hazard caused by a volcanic eruption. Most candidates were awarded credit, however, some candidates confused impact with hazard, for these types of questions the physical hazard from the volcano is required rather than buildings destroyed. The mark was awarded for the hazard responsible for the building destruction e.g. ashfall.

3(b)(iii) Candidates were required to explain one reason why volcanoes are found at hotspots. This question required a response specific to hotspot volcano formation and not generic points linked to any volcano formation. Therefore, responses simply stating 'magma rises' although true for all volcanoes generally was not awarded credit as an explanation for the formation of hotspot volcanoes.

3(c) This item required candidates to use Figure 3a, which is a resource showing a map of Montserrat with key information about the impacts of the volcanic eruption. Candidates generally coped well with this question and were able to engage with the resource accurately. Some candidates found the focus of the question on long-term impacts more challenging meaning they were awarded the marks for evidence from the resource, but their development was not a long term impact. Although, the term long-term is subjective in these questions it is important candidates are able to explain an impact which lasts for a prolonged period of time

3(d) Most candidates were able to correctly identify the country at risk from the tropical cyclone shown in the resource.

3(e) This item required candidates to explain two causes of tropical cyclones. Historically, candidates have found it more challenging to explain the causes of a cyclone rather than the factors responsible for their distribution. This was evident in this question, where some candidates had described the distribution rather than explain a causal factor. However, many candidates were able to explain two causal factors and there was an improvement in their explanation of both wind shear and Coriolis force this series.

3(f) Candidates were required to explain one reason why people live in areas at risk from tropical cyclones.

It is often these 3-mark questions which students find most demanding as they often find it challenging developing one point in sufficient depth to be awarded 3-marks. Historically, candidates have performed well on questions focused on reasons why people live near hazards. Where candidates did not achieve full marks this was because they explained a reason clearly linked to volcanic hazards rather than tropical cyclones. Or because they wrote about poverty which was credited but is more challenging to

develop sufficiently to gain the third mark as poverty and 'don't have enough money/can't afford to move' are the same idea and cannot be double credited.

3(g) These 8-mark extended writing questions candidates are required to blend their use of the resource (AO4) with their own knowledge and understanding of the issue presented (AO3), therefore they are not case study questions, rather they require the candidates to apply their geographical understanding to the context shown in the resource.

In this instance candidates were required to study Figure 3c, a map showing the location of the epicentre and severity of ground shaking for earthquakes in two different countries and a fact file of physical factors and impacts.

Candidates were able to access Figure 3c and describe the contrast between the two examples. The focus of this question was on the influence of physical factors on vulnerability and some candidates were able to formulate strong arguments for why the impacts were less despite 'worse' physical factors.

The command word 'analyse' needs to be addressed to achieve full marks and many candidates found this challenging as there was often minimal judgement demonstrated in candidate responses as they often remained descriptive.

Section B

Question 4

4(a), 5(a), 6(a)

Please note that the comments made on Q.4 also apply to Q.5 and Q.6 as the questions are in parallel and the resources very similar. Section B contained short answer questions on familiar fieldwork and the extended 8-mark response on unfamiliar fieldwork this series.

For this question candidates needed to describe one sampling strategy they used during their data collection. Most candidates were able to correctly identify a sampling strategy. Some candidates developed their response by giving an advantage of the strategy e.g. less bias rather than meeting the demand of the command word and describe how they carried out the strategy. A minority of candidates stated a sampling strategy and then developed this by describing a different sampling strategy for example 'stratified by collecting data every 10 m'. It is important candidates know the different command word demands to ensure they write a response to the question posed.

4(b), (5(b), 6(b)

Please note that the comments made on Q.4 also apply to Q.5 and Q.6 as the questions are in parallel and the resources very similar. Section B contained questions on both familiar and unfamiliar contexts this series.

This item required candidates to explain one quantitative method they chose for their data collection. Most candidates gained at least 2 marks for this question, as they identified a variable and correctly outlined how they carried out the method. To meet the

explain command word candidates needed to go beyond describing the method and clear a reason why they were collecting this data in this way. Less candidates were awarded the 3rd mark as they often only described the data collection method. A very small number of candidates wrote a response linked to a qualitative data collection method and these were not awarded credit.

4(c), 5(c), 6(c)

Please note that the comments made on Q.4 also apply to Q.5 and Q.6 as the questions are in parallel and the resources very similar. Section B contained questions on both familiar and unfamiliar contexts this series.

Candidates were required to explain why two of their data presentation techniques were appropriate for their data collected. Candidates need to be clear on the difference between why a data presentation technique is appropriate and an advantage of the generic data presentation strategy. The focus of this question was on why a line graph is appropriate for the data being presented not simply that a line graph shows a trend/pattern. Candidates were awarded a mark for identifying the variable being presented on the data presentation technique identified, as this is required to determine whether the technique is correct for the data being shown and then a development of this. Candidates were not awarded credit for simply identifying a data presentation technique.

On some occasions candidate responses focused on data analysis techniques such as working out a mean. These were not awarded credit as they were responses focusing on a different stage of the enquiry process.

4(d), 5(d), 6(d)

Please note that the comments made on Q.4 also apply to Q.5 and Q.6 as the questions are in parallel and the resources very similar. Section B contained questions on both familiar and unfamiliar contexts this series.

For this question candidates were required to explain one reason why collecting more data can make their investigation more reliable. Candidates coped well with the demands of this question. Where candidates were not awarded full marks it was most often a result of them repeating what was already stated in the question stem which already stated collecting more data is more reliable.

4(e), 5(e), 6(e)

Please note that the comments made on Q.4 also apply to Q.5 and Q.6 as the questions are in parallel and the resources very similar. Section B contained questions on both familiar and unfamiliar contexts this series.

It is important to remind candidates to write their responses under the correct enquiry context, a proportion of candidates wrote coastal enquiry responses in the river enquiry and hazardous environments enquiry questions. This limited their responses as only generic statements plausible to the enquiry context being answered could be credited.

These 8-mark extended writing questions candidates are required to blend their use of the resource (AO4) with their own knowledge and understanding of the geographical enquiry stage presented (AO3), therefore, they require the candidates to apply their geographical understanding to the context shown in the resource.

In this instance candidates were required to study Figure 4/5/6a, an annotated map showing the location of their geographical enquiry as a secondary data source for the students enquiry and some information about the enquiry and the enquiry question and hypothesis suggested by the students prior to carrying out their primary data collection.

The focus of this question required an evaluation of the hypothesis reached by the students in helping them to answer their enquiry question. This is the first time this stage of the enquiry process has been assessed as an 8-mark unfamiliar enquiry question. Candidates generally coped well with the demands of this question with many being able to identify clear limitations in the secondary data shown and make some level of judgement as to whether the hypothesis would be helpful in answering the enquiry question. It was the depth and breadth of the response and judgement which distinguished candidates between Level 2 and 3 responses.

Candidates are provided space to provide their geographical enquiry title. They do not receive marks for this, but it provides context for the response that follows.

To gain level 3 credit the command word ‘evaluate’ needs to be met which requires a concluding statement at the end of a response for full marks. Although, simply having a concluding statement does not automatically move a response into Level 3, there needs to be a range of ideas in sufficient depth to meet the demands of the level descriptors.

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