Pearson Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE in Geography (4WGE1)
Unit 01R 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 series for this qualification, although, there was a 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 know that 'pollution' on its own will not be credited, the type needs to be qualified.
- 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 how they ensured their data presentation was accurate.

- 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.

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 a store in the hydrological cycle.

1(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 river velocity.

1(b)(ii) Candidates accessed this question well and were able to state one characteristic of the channel shape in the lower course of a river. On occasion some candidates identified a characteristic of the river valley rather than the channel shape.

1(c) A significant proportion of candidates were able to achieve 2 marks on this question, where they were required to explain one reason why some sediment is transported by traction. A minority of responses focused on erosion processes.

1(d) This question required candidates to use a resource (Figure 1a) showing a stacked bar graph for current and future water demand. The first mark was awarded for identification of a relevant piece of evidence from the resource, in this case identifying a category which had increased between the two years shown on the graph and a second mark for a reason why this increase may have occurred.

A large proportion of candidates were able to achieve 4 marks, where this was not the case it was often as they only identified a change and did not develop this to give a reason for the change. A very small proportion of candidates wrote a response focusing on irrigation which was the only category to decrease between the two years shown and the question focused on reasons for increase in water demand not a reason for a change in water demand and so a decrease in demand could not be awarded credit.

1(e) The majority of candidates achieved the mark for this question; a few candidates identified the landform as a meander which was not correct for an upland river landscape shown.

1(f) This question required candidates to explain how one climate and one slope factor can have an effect on river processes. Generally, candidates coped with the demand of this question well. A proportion of candidates did not gain full marks as their development was not linked to river processes instead focusing on the impact on discharge which was not enough to show they understood the impact on river processes.

1(g) For this question candidates were required to explain how one source of river pollution can affect water quality. 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. However, there was more evidence of candidates being awarded 3 marks showing an improvement in their depth of understanding.

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 strengths of the flood prevention method shown, using the textboxes most often to discuss the pros and cons of the strategy. Some candidates also demonstrated their understanding of the hydrograph shown to support their points.

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)(i) This MCQ was an accessible start to the question with a significant majority of candidates being able to identify one cause of coastal flooding.

2(a)(ii) In this question candidates were required to state one other impact of sea level change on coastal landforms. Most candidates were awarded the mark for this question with the most common responses being raised beaches. A few candidates misinterpreted the question as asking for a cause for sea level rise and were not awarded credit. A few other candidates stated an impact on the human environment and not coastal landforms are requested in the question.

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

2(c) In this question candidates were required to explain one type of soft engineering used in coastal management. Most candidates were awarded at least 1 mark as they were able to name a soft engineering strategy, however, a significant proportion of candidates only went on to describe the strategy rather than explain how it works to reduce erosion/flooding (and therefore manage the coast).

2(d) This question required candidates to use a resource, Figure 2a, showing two photographs of different hard engineering strategies. 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.

2(e) For this question candidates were required to explain how one abiotic characteristic can affect a named coastal ecosystem. 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 found explaining the role of abiotic factors more challenging therefore, it was pleasing to see that candidates generally coped with the demands of this question well. There was almost no evidence of candidates identifying a biotic factor in their initial point, this meant many candidates were awarded at least 2 marks. Some did find it a challenge to create the chain of consequence required for these 3-mark questions.

2(f) The majority of students correctly identified the labelled country with the shortest length of saltmarsh ecosystem.

2(g) This item required candidates to explain two threats caused by tourism to a coastal ecosystem. Generally, this question was answered well by candidates and although 'such as coral reefs' was stated in the question responses about any coastal ecosystem were credited. Most candidates coped with the demands of this question well, although, it would be helpful to remind candidates pollution needs to be qualified to be awarded credit. Some candidates found it challenging to develop their initial point, for example some stated a tourist 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 tourism threat.

2(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.

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

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 transport/deposition/erosion 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 a scale used to measure earthquake magnitude.

3(b)(i) This MCQ was an accessible start to the question with a significant majority of candidates being able to identify the statement which best describes the focus of an earthquake.

3(b)(ii) In this question candidates were required to state one hazard caused by an earthquake. Most candidates were awarded credit, however, some candidates confused

impact with hazard, for these types of questions the physical hazard from the earthquake is required rather than buildings destroyed (which is an impact resulting from the ground shaking). The mark was awarded for the hazard responsible for the building destruction e.g. ground shaking/seismic waves.

3(b)(iii) Candidates were required to explain one long-term impact earthquakes can have on the natural environment. Most candidates were awarded marks for this question, however, a few explained an impact on people/human environment which was not awarded credit. 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(c) This item required candidates to use Figure 3a, which is a resource showing an information leaflet provided to residents in Salt Lake City. Candidates generally coped well with this question and were able to engage with the resource accurately. Some candidates only provided direct lifts in their responses, and these are not awarded credit, it would be helpful to remind candidates that although they need to use evidence from the resource for these 4-mark questions there needs to be evidence of them using the information rather than just copying the text.

3(d) Most candidates were able to correctly identify the plate boundary shown in the resource, where this was not the case most candidates had written constructive.

3(e) This item required candidates to explain two characteristics of volcanoes found at different types of plate boundary. The focus of this question was not on why volcanoes are formed at different plate boundaries, which meant some candidates were not awarded marks as they provided a detailed explanation of why volcanoes are formed at destructive and constructive plate boundaries but no detail about the different type of volcano this results in or why. A very small number of candidates wrote a response about why volcanoes did not occur at transform (conservative) plate boundaries which also was not relevant to the question asked. It is important candidates can explain why shield volcanoes have the characteristics they do, and they composite/stratovolcanoes have very different characteristics to shield volcanoes.

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

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 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 tropical cyclone and the strength of the wind in two different countries and a fact file of physical factors and impacts of each example.

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 5

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

Please note that the comments made on Q.5 (which is the most popular fieldwork question on the regional paper) also apply to Q.4 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 health and safety risk included in their risk assessment. Candidates coped well with the demand of this question, with the vast majority being awarded 2 marks. This was a more open question than previous risk questions as risk assessments contain risk and mitigation strategies and so candidates could be awarded 2 marks for identifying a risk and its consequence or identifying a risk and its mitigation strategy.

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

Please note that the comments made on Q.5 also apply to Q.4 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 method they chose for their data collection which helped them answer their enquiry title. 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 collecting this data would help answer their enquiry title/question/hypothesis. Less candidates were awarded the 3rd mark as they often only described the data collection method.

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

Please note that the comments made on Q.5 also apply to Q.4 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 accurate. Candidates need to be clear on the difference between why a data presentation technique is accurate and an advantage of the data presentation strategy. The focus of this question was on how they ensured the data presented was accurate. Candidates were awarded a mark for identifying a way they increased accuracy and a second mark for the development of this. Candidates were not awarded credit for simply identifying a data presentation technique.

Fairly frequently candidates wrote responses focusing on how they ensured their data collection was accurate which was not relevant to the question which focused on accuracy of the presentation technique itself.

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

Please note that the comments made on Q.5 also apply to Q.4 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 there might be an anomaly in the data they collected. Generally, candidates coped well with the demands of this question and demonstrated a clear understanding of why anomalies occur.

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

Please note that the comments made on Q.5 also apply to Q.4 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 5(a & b)/4/6, an annotated map showing the location of their geographical enquiry and annotated images over different time periods of their study area. This secondary was used for the students to reach a conclusion.

The focus of this question required an evaluation of the extent to which the secondary data supported the students' conclusion. This is the first time this stage of the enquiry process has been assessed as an 8-mark unfamiliar enquiry question. Candidates generally engaged well with the demands of this question with many being able to identify limitations in the secondary data shown and make some level of judgement as to whether the secondary data supported the conclusion. 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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