AQA

GCSE

GEOGRAPHY

8035/2 Challenges in the human environment
Report on the Examination

8035/2
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General Comments

This report covers responses from Paper 2 GCSE Geography in 2023. This was the sixth year of examining this specification, but only the third where it was in the intended format and taken by a full cohort of students.

Schools should be commended in that, despite any potential forecast 'learning loss' the paper showed evidence of thorough preparation for the examination with a great range and variety of content clearly taught. Students of all abilities were able to access the resources with good use being made of them for all of the questions. The rubric was generally followed with errors in Section C uncommon. The full range of marks was seen. There were few instances where students failed to answer a question unless they left the majority of the paper blank. There was limited evidence that students were short of time as most were able to complete the paper.

The paper proved to be very accessible to all students as the questions elicited answers from students across the ability range. Many examiners commented that students who were prepared to 'have a go' were able to accumulate marks and achieve a creditable overall score. The paper still effectively discriminated between students of varying ability with a spectrum seen from the most basic answers at one end to some truly outstanding geography at the other.

As with any examination there are a number of general lessons to be taken which may improve performance as students and teachers re-familiarise themselves with the full specification content and range of question formats:

- The most salient lesson should be that questions such as 01.6, 02.3 and 03.4, which require students to show understanding (AO2) and then apply this (AO3), continue to represent a significant challenge. Simply repeating case study information is knowledge (AO1) and cannot gain credit in this style of question. Simply repeating the words in the question is not application. Schools could usefully engage in further practice and preparation in these types of questions.

- Where a source is provided, students are expected to make use of it, particularly where the command is "using figure… and your own understanding". Students too often merely lift text and repeat it and seem to ignore pictorial information in favour of text, thus only utilising part of the resource and potentially limiting their marks. This fundamental skill (AO3) of extracting information from sources and then applying it remains an area for development.

- Schools and students should remember that 10% of the marks come from mathematical skills and therefore they should be able to perform a range of mathematical skills accurately. Some mathematical skills were sound but others markedly less so.

- It was encouraging that almost all students knew, and were able to respond to, the command words. The key feature that indicated students operating in the upper levels was their ability to not rely on a pre-learned answer and assume they knew what the question asked, but to organise information to the specific demands of the question as set.

Section A: Urban issues and challenges

01.1 Most students gained a mark as expected for a 1 mark question at the start of the paper.

01.2 Most students knew how to calculate the mean as previous questions have demonstrated. Not reading the question carefully limited many to one mark for not rounding to 1dp. Some were hampered by not having use of a calculator.

01.3 It was rare that this was incorrect if attempted, in common with other simple graph completions. If no marks were gained it was more likely to be because it was missed out, an all too common issue with graph completions.

01.4 Mostly correct, with C (4 times) the most common incorrect answer.

01.5 Almost all students gained at least 1 mark. Many referred to poverty and developed this idea to gain the second mark. There were few that made use of other approaches such as gangs, corruption and the sheer density of informal settlements making crime difficult to resolve. It was a shame to see so many stereotypical and simplistic views equating crime as the inevitable result of poverty.

01.6 The figure made sense to most students who then identified education and used the figure in some way. There was some development and understanding but few achieved level 3, with most gaining low level 2 marks. Mixing economic with social opportunities was a frequent occurrence. Social opportunities were also often simply seen as socialising. Very few students considered the 'to what extent' aspect of the question or were able to link the opportunities to urban growth.

01.7 Mostly correct.

01.8 Mostly correct.

01.9 This proved a very accessible question, with the vast majority gaining at least 2 marks. Those who also used their own examples were able to extend their marks. Errors occurred when students wrote about climate change and air quality or where the congestion reduction was implicit only.

01.10 Many students struggled to access both marks with largely generic answers that could have applied to any UK city and therefore only gained 1 mark.

01.11 An accessible question with a full range of marks awarded. Students were able to demonstrate AO2 links between urban change and social and economic opportunities, but many struggled to move beyond a generic 'geography of anywhere' as their answers lacked AO1. Again, students frequently confused 'social opportunities' with 'socialising'.

The best answers addressed economic and social in turn and then clear conclusions as to which were greater. Weaker responses made similar mistakes to previous exams in discussing opportunities vs challenges or continued themes from the previous question, in this case transport and congestion. A significant number of answers simply wrote all they knew about a city or answers so generic that they could have been about cities in any income bracket in the world. There remains scope for schools to help students better address the specific demands of questions.

Section B: The changing economic world

02.1 The majority of answers were correct.

02.2 Most students were able to gain at least 1 mark for a valid piece of evidence and grid square. Too many students tended to name anything they saw on the map without any consideration of why this would be a good site for a science park.

02.3 As in previous years and in common with the other 6 mark AO2/AO3 questions on this paper, students struggled to respond by applying their knowledge and understanding to the new situation. They were in some cases using the resource and then developing their answers, but many were just repeating the information. Most could access some elements of the environmental sustainability, although often implicitly only. Similarly, 'to what extent' was rarely fully addressed, with few answers at level 3. Those who did access level 3 generally did so by properly examining the photograph and considering the carbon footprints of construction and employee transportation. Answers were often more of a narrative of industrial developments and were entirely positive regarding sustainability.

02.4 Rarely wrong if completed, which it almost always was.

02.5 The best answers gave reasons for the inaccuracy of the measure. However, these were rare, as few stated a disadvantage about birth rates, instead saying what they were not.

02.6 Most were correct.

02.7 There was good knowledge here with reference to landlocked countries and hazards. If the answer was incorrect, it was owing to not understanding what physical causes were.

02.8 Students either knew how to calculate the interquartile range or they didn't. The majority didn't. The most frequent wrong answer was the range. Schools and students need to remember the 10% of maths marks on the paper, which might include such skills. They are all listed in the specification.

02.9 An accessible question with a good range of marks with almost all students gaining a mark. Many were able to respond to the resource and stem and then link debt relief to the development process. Were students struggled it was because of a poor understanding of debt relief, often conflating it with loans.

02.10 Examiners felt this was better answered than 01.11, with both more AO1 place knowledge and better AO3 evaluation. It performed better than equivalent questions in previous exams (though clearly there was no equivalent in 2022). Most students were able to come up with some valid points and make the link between improvements to quality of life and the cost to the environment. The best answers used Nigeria and had good place specific detail linked to Shell and were able to apply their knowledge to the question. Weaker students were able to gain marks through generic answers linking environmental issues to economic development.

Section C: The challenge of resource management

03.1 The majority of answers were correct.

03.2 Generally well answered, as most were able to identify at least one change. A small number described the figure and some started to give reasons.

03.3 Mostly answered well with lots of students of all abilities picking up marks. Students seemed well versed in the need to change from fossil fuels to renewable energy. A small number misread the question and answered regarding overall demand increase linked to population rise rather than the demand for different sources.

03.4 This question continued the observation on this and previous exams that students struggle to effectively respond to questions demanding interpretation and use of a resource in an unfamiliar context. A significant number misunderstood the question and answered about 'trying to reduce carbon dioxide'… and why that was an opportunity or challenge. This rarely gained any credit. There was not much of a middle ground. Students either got the idea of the challenges and opportunities around reducing the carbon footprint in the UK or they did not. Some good responses focussed on local food production as an opportunity and out of season exotic foods as a challenge. A small number used the pie chart well to discuss most emissions coming from production and the challenges of that.

There was an even spread of answers to the 3 options (Questions 4,5 and 6).

Questions 4: Food

04.1 The majority of answers were correct. Those that chose the wrong option generally gained a mark for the percentage calculation. However, a significant minority were unable to perform a percentage calculation, reinforcing this report's previous comments regarding mathematical skills.

04.2 Of all the options questions, this was the least accurately answered. There remains a need to practise and develop this skill of 'describe a distribution' Many were let down by poor locational knowledge.

04.3 Mostly correct unless they defined food deficit.

04.4 Mostly correct with students understanding the link between pest damage and the impact on the supply chain.

04.5 Most answers did little more than lift from the figure without much development. Many talked about rice fish farming, hydroponics, GM foods and greenhouses in Almeria. Whilst many accessed level 2, few went beyond this as AO3 was again weak as few explored "to what extent" well.

Questions 5: Water

05.1 The majority of answers were correct. Those that chose the wrong option generally gained a mark on the percentage calculation. However, a significant minority were unable to perform a percentage calculation, reinforcing this report's previous comments regarding mathematical skills.

05.2 Most gained at least one mark. Answers were hampered again by a lack of ability to describe distribution and poor locational knowledge.

05.3 Most correct unless they defined water deficit.

05.4 Few scored well as most didn't understand the term infrastructure.

05.5 Similar to 04.5, most lifted from the figure with limited development. There was better AO3 in evidence however as students explored the idea of cost and its impact on supply.

Questions 6: Energy

06.1 The majority of answers were correct. Those that chose the wrong option generally gained a mark on the percentage calculation. However, a significant minority were unable to perform a percentage calculation, reinforcing this report's previous comments regarding mathematical skills.

06.2 The best answered of the 3 distribution questions. Compass point confusion and lack of attention to anomalies were the limiting factors.

06.3 Most correct unless students defined energy deficit.

06.4 War and conflict were the common choices, with many answers reflecting the current situation in Ukraine and the impact on Russian energy supplies.

06.5 As with the other equivalent questions many students merely lifted information from the resource. As a result, they wrote a lot without developing their ideas and left little room to discuss other examples. Most used wind power and tidal power or referred to Fig.11 as to how suitable they were for the UK. Understanding of the reliability of tides and wind power allowed appropriate discussions in the best responses.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.