



General Certificate of Education

Geography 6036

Specification B

GGB4 Global Change

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - June series

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GGB4

General

The questions set for GGB4 are at a level well above that of AS, and require more depth of knowledge and understanding as well as greater sophistication of response, particularly in the essays of Section B. It is pleasing, therefore, to report that the overall standard of response for this unit was once again very encouraging with the great majority of candidates evidently fully prepared for this examination.

In terms of popularity, in Section A, Question 2 was more popular than Question 1 in the proportion of 4:1, and in Section B, Question 3 was marginally more popular than Question 4. In terms of relative performance, it is very pleasing to report that, on the basis of a sample of scripts marked by the Senior Examiners, the median mark was similar for all four questions – 14/15 marks. All four questions were accessible to candidates; there were very few low scoring answers, particularly so in the essays in Section B where the great majority of candidates scored at least 8 marks. There were few reported cases of rubric infringement.

It is appropriate for some of the earlier paragraphs of this report that general issues and concerns are addressed initially. Subsequent aspects of this report will examine more specific problems encountered in individual questions in each of the two Sections. As usual, many of the general issues reflect similar concerns faced during A Level examinations in the past.

Examiners were frequently impressed by quality of some of the scripts they marked. The better scripts were well organised and logically presented, and followed the structure of the tasks asked of them, either structured question or essay format. Such scripts demonstrated that detailed learning and understanding had been undertaken. Such candidates used well-documented case study material that was both up-to-date and relevant. Candidates who used such material rose above the level of the generalised statements offered by weaker students, and hence they stood out clearly against these. Mark schemes are written with detailed case study material in mind, and it is the use of such information that gives better candidates access to the higher levels of the mark scheme.

There were few instances of candidates misinterpreting the demands of the question asked of them, although Question 1(d) and Question 2(b) did highlight some lack of understanding of the demands of that task. The nature of the command words should be familiar to all candidates by the time they have reached A2, and they should be aware of the hierarchy that exists in these words. “Describe” and “outline” are fairly commonplace in geography examinations and candidates should know the requirements of these commands. The command word “discuss” does however present a higher level of challenge. The key here is for the candidate to build up an argument about an issue, in other words, to recognise that there is more than one approach or interpretation. Arguments for and against should be offered, or statements that are positive and negative, with good use being made of supportive evidence.

The essays were set to be as comparable in both style and demand as was possible, despite being based on different contexts within the specification. Centres may have noted the following similarities: the quotation at the outset; the overall command to discuss the statement; the breakdown of tasks within the bullet points, each following the same progression of internal commands from identification, to description, and then to discuss. The bullet points are there to guide the candidate through the construction of their response. Indeed, they act as a form of essay plan. They are also important in that the bullet points form an integral part of the mark scheme for the essays. Candidates have the opportunity to reach the higher levels of response

for each of the bullet points, the more times they do so, the more overall credit will be gained. Centres are also asked to note that the essays have 5 marks specifically set aside for quality of language and degree of exemplification. Those answers that are well organised, clearly presented and logical, as well as being fully supported by good use of examples will gain marks within the maximum range of credit for this part of the assessment.

Section A

Question 1

Few candidates had difficulty with the opening definitions in part (a). A mark was reserved for the respective key ideas of “change over time” and “human activity” for each of the definitions with additional credit for further development.

In part (b), most candidates did know and understand the succession known as a lithosere, with the majority accessing Level 2 within this section of their answer. Many were able to provide a guide to the various plants that develop over time in a lithosere, although weaker candidates were restricted to features such as “bushes” and “trees” without any detail of species. The main area of weakness here was the lack of depth of understanding of the processes. Many answers were repetitive, continually restating the ideas of weathering followed by soil formation followed by the addition of humus, thereby providing a suitable environment for the subsequent plant species. Processes such as those of nutrient cycling and competition also needed to be discussed to access the highest marks.

Most candidates were also able to provide some information on the effects of human activity on vegetation successions in (c). Various forms of human activity – clearance, deforestation, afforestation, the burning of heather, grazing etc – were all mentioned in varying degrees of detail. Better answers were able to refer to specific areas of the British Isles where these activities had taken place, and were then able to evaluate more precisely their impact on the vegetation of that area. A well-developed case study of a plagioclimax created by human activity, such as the development and maintenance of heather moorland in the North York Moors, usually accessed a higher level of credit.

Part (d) tended to score less well. The main issue here was the poor quality of the diagrams offered by candidates. 2 marks were awarded specifically for the diagram; examiners were asked to make a judgement as to the quality of the diagram – essentially was the diagram offered a good indication of the profile of the chosen soil? The majority of candidates only gained one mark. The great majority of candidates clearly identified their chosen soil type; those that did not again left the task of identification to the examiners, which was not always possible. A further disappointing aspect of this question was that although most candidates could offer descriptive points regarding the chosen soil type, they were often unable to explain them. However, candidates who were able to show an understanding of the role of more than one factor in the formation of a soil, such as climate, relief, organic content, or the role of soil fauna, accessed the Level 2 range of credit. Similarly, an explanation of more than one soil forming process, such as leaching, podsolisation and lessivage, accessed the higher range of marks. Finally, it must be noted that some candidates chose to place all descriptive and explanatory points on to a highly detailed diagram. This approach was acceptable, in some cases gaining full marks.

Question 2

As in Question 1 (a) above, the great majority of candidates gained 3 or 4 marks. The only errors of note were by those few candidates who totally mixed up their definitions, defining destructive plate margins as those where plates diverge, and constructive plate margins as those where plates converged.

Part (b) was, on the whole, answered disappointedly. As with Question 1(d) 2 marks were reserved for the quality of the chosen diagram. The great majority of diagrams were disappointingly weak. As the question was focussed around the effects of tectonic processes, to represent ocean trenches, earthquakes, volcanoes etc. as being features of a static event was inaccurate. A starting point had to be the relative direction of plate movement, often not given. Arrows of movement were frequently given in the mantle, rather than the crust; there was often no indication of movement of andesitic magma within the crust, thereby giving rise to surface volcanoes. Indeed, one examiner commented on the “sloppy” positioning of many of the associated features. The key element of the question was “processes”, and then to outline the effects of these processes on the earth’s surface. For example, for destructive boundaries, Level 1 credit was awarded for subduction, whereas the melting and subsequent rising of oceanic crust, and the creation of andesitic volcanoes gained Level 2. Few gained Level 2 credit for the downwarping of the continental plate to form a trench, and similarly few included the crumpling of crust and sediment in the formation of fold mountains.

Part (c) was answered better. Most candidates recognised that this question could be answered with reference to the Hawaiian Islands and consequently once they recognised the important element of plate movement and consequential effects on the character of the islands they accessed Level 2. Further detail concerning radioactive processes within the crust, magma type and consequential shape of volcanoes, and geographical patterns gained additional credit.

Part (d) was answered well by the majority of candidates. There is a large variety of evidence, geological and biological, to which candidates could refer in order to gain high marks, and many did. The main issue was that candidates frequently did not complete their answers by providing statements to fully satisfy the question. For example, many candidates referred to palaeomagnetism, and were able to describe it as a process. However, many then failed to explain how this process supported the theory of plate tectonics. It was a feature of the answers of many candidates that more than two pieces of evidence was given. In such cases, examiners were instructed to mark all of the pieces offered by the candidate, and then to “count” the better two. However, such candidates could not attain the highest mark – 7.

Section B

The processes which led to the setting and subsequent assessment of the essays are explained above. The following will examine the main issues regarding each of the essays in turn.

Question 3

As stated earlier, this question was the slightly more popular in this section. Whilst the majority of answers were satisfactory to very good in standard, a significant minority were very disappointing. The main reason for this was the failure to (i) name a suitable area of study, and (ii) to provide detailed case study material from the urban area named. In the latter case, much

of the material could have applied to any location that suffered the hazards given, in other words the material did not relate specifically to Los Angeles, Mexico City or the other areas identified by the candidates. In some cases, some inappropriate urban areas experiencing multiple hazards were given. These included California and Spain. Other areas named offered great potential, such as Naples. But, it has to be noted that this is a contemporary geography examination and hence the hazards faced by the residents of Pompeii and Herculaneum are not relevant. In each of these cases it was difficult to award credit for any of the bullet points that followed.

In all cases candidates were able to provide statements of the hazards affecting their chosen urban area, for example in the case of Los Angeles there were the hazards of earthquakes, smog, landslides, fire and ethnic unrest and crime etc. A detailed description of one hazard accessed the Level 2 range of credit, and well-developed detail of more than one hazard with some statements of all or most of origin, frequency and scale accessed Level 3. Effects of each of these hazards were then provided, such as buildings destroyed by earthquakes, gas pipes ruptured, large areas of bush burnt and so on, with once again case study detail of one hazard accessing Level 2, and more than one hazard accessing Level 3. A common problem that candidates gave themselves concerned tsunamis in Los Angeles. Many actually stated that tsunamis had never affected Los Angeles, so that made it very difficult to describe the effects of one on the city. A lot of their answer was therefore speculative. Hence, candidates need to take more care in answering such questions in order not to self penalise. The second bullet point was under-exploited by many candidates. The question requested a description of the inter-relationship(s) between two different hazards. Many gave simple causal links, for example, earthquakes generated landslips, but then failed to develop other hazards that could then follow as a consequence, such as fire and looting. There were, however, some excellent answers that developed a range of inter-relationships, the most successful being developed around the central theme of urban sprawl.

The great majority of answers examined responses (management, prediction and prevention) in very general terms, and not specifically in the context of the area identified at the start of the question. Sets of simple statements of response or a detailed account of one response accessed Level 2, for example to counter-act crime in Los Angeles those who discussed isolated private security condominiums, with gated access, accessed this level. Detail of two such responses to different hazards accessed Level 3. As elsewhere on this paper, candidates need to be reminded of the need to learn and reproduce detailed case study material throughout their answers.

To achieve Level IV, candidates had to provide good evaluative comments that linked back to the opening statement in quotation marks. Credit was awarded for those comments that either supported, or disagreed with, the assertion – there was no correct answer. The credit was awarded for the strength of the summative argument.

Question 4

The first bullet point was generally dealt with well. Here, Level 3 credit was awarded to well developed detail of the groupings of nations, with clear accounts that were chronologically correct and spatially correct. Most candidates concentrated on the European Union, and gave good accounts of its growth and development. Unfortunately, too many candidates let themselves down by giving dates of entry that were incorrect, and also sequentially inaccurate. For example, some said that the UK was a founder member, whereas a surprising number failed to say that Italy was a founder member, yet curiously the majority could identify Luxembourg as being one. Other groupings of nations were offered, NATO and NAFTA being

the most common. However, examiners felt that the UEFA Champions League was beyond the remit of the question.

The reasoning for such groupings proved to be the main weakness. The majority of candidates gave generalised reasons for joining the EU such as, to increase trade, to have a common currency, to help farmers, to allow the free movement of workers and so on. These are correct and valid, but detail of, say, the Common Agricultural Policy, the benefits of Objective One/Two status, benefits of the common currency (the Euro) and of the Social Chapter would have taken the answer to the higher levels.

The majority of candidates were able to answer the final bullet point well, giving good, valid accounts of the growth of separatist pressures around the world. For many it was the quality of response to this section that allowed them to access the lower end of the credit for Level III. The most quoted such pressures were the Basques in northern Spain, and the Scots. Others included the separatist pressures in Quebec (both French speakers and Inuits) and Northern Ireland. The main criticism that can be offered here is that many responses digressed into the effects or consequences of separatist pressures, which were irrelevant. Consequently, many answers were more detailed than necessary. For example, an over elaboration of the case study of the Basques may have caused some candidates not to provide further reasons for separatism in areas such as northern Iraq/south-east Turkey (the Kurds), Sri Lanka (Tamils) or Chechnya. Indeed Level 4 was available to candidates by either referring back to the overall quotation as in Question 3 above, or by offering a wide range and distinctive range of reasons for separatist pressures around the world.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.