



General Certificate of Education

Geography 6036

Specification B

GGB5 The Synoptic Unit

Report on the Examination

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The topic for this Issue Evaluation Exercise seemed to be one which appealed to a large majority of candidates, so they were able to write answers that showed the candidates' interest in the subject and produced interesting material to mark.

It was also clear that the overwhelming majority of candidates dealt with a topic that was quite sensitive in a very mature way. They were well aware of a variety of social, political and cultural issues and they handled these in a sensitive and concerned way but generally managed to do this in a detached and academic style. Great concern for the needs of the refugees was shown but this was combined with a sensible consideration of the needs of the existing residents of the areas. This balanced, humane attitude allowed candidates to show their geographical understanding well – and very well in many cases.

The groups and individuals who had provided information for the Advance Information Booklet (AIB) had been very cautious about their material. They had, of necessity, kept very careful checks on what went into the AIB because of the sensitive nature of the on-going situation in Bolton and in other cities that have subsequently become hosts to refugees. However, had the people from the Gateway Project been able to see the candidates' answers I feel sure that they would have been very impressed by the compassion combined with a balanced approach and fairly rigorous analysis that was shown in the work.

All five questions produced a full spread of marks with a fair number of candidates obtaining Level 3 marks on the three questions that went up to the third level. However, it was apparent that there was a pattern of candidates from some centres scoring their level 3 marks on one question whilst candidates from other centres did best on other questions. The emphasis given to different aspects of Advance Information Booklet (AIB) during the preparatory period clearly influenced this pattern.

Of course a few of the very best candidates scored consistently well across all the questions but the paper did prove challenging in terms of time demands. There was not a lot of evidence of candidates failing to finish the questions but it was apparent that some candidates had to hurry to complete their fifth answer. However, this rarely led to a serious loss of marks; rather candidates showed that they were very wise in terms of time management. The vast majority of them managed to organise their time so that the length of their five answers was closely proportional to the number of marks allocated. So, even those who hurried their last answer usually seemed to finish their main arguments well.

Question 1

A great many separate 'bits' of relevant information for answering this question were provided in the AIB. The main skill that the examiners were looking for in the answers to the question was that of selecting relevant ideas from different sources and synthesising these to make a coherent argument.

The Principal Examiner's original intention with this question had been to get candidates to discuss the reasons why these particular individuals were considered to be amongst the most deprived and threatened people in the world and therefore worthy of fast-tracking to offer them a second chance in a country where they would be protected from persecution. However, it soon became obvious that some candidates had interpreted the question slightly differently and so the mark scheme had to be adapted.

Four possible strands were identified:

- Suffering and persecution in the country of origin – Congo or Liberia;
- Lack of opportunity and continued suffering in the country of first refuge – Uganda or Sierra Leone;
- Skills and personal attributes that would make these people welcome in the UK;
- Particular reasons why Bolton might want these people to settle.

Candidates who wrote about strands (1) and (2) generally produced the best answers. Strand (3) also presented some interesting possibilities but less opportunity for development of answers. It was difficult to develop Strand (4) beyond a Level 1 answer. However, most candidates combined elements from one or more of the strands and so most reached at least Level 2 standard.

The best candidates, who reached Level 3, usually did so by combining information and ideas from different parts of the AIB and also sometimes by adding their own knowledge from their research. The weaker candidates generally just lifted pieces of information from the AIB but did not add much of their own or make relevant links between different data sources.

On the second page of Item 4 in the AIB, under the heading “What are the experiences of refugees?” there was a list of ten factors that are often present amongst refugees selected for fast-track citizenship. Many good candidates quoted examples from this list of criteria and then illustrated how the chosen people fulfilled these criteria, usually quoting details from Item 1. This was how candidates were able to develop very persuasive arguments.

Some also discussed the three alternative solutions to the plight of refugees, that were listed on the first page of Item 4, and then went on to explain why voluntary repatriation and permanent settlement in the country of first refuge were not safe, realistic possibilities for these people.

One interesting variation of the ideas in strand (3) was provided by candidates who were keen to dismiss the acceptance of these refugees as a purely cynical ploy by the British government to obtain cheap skilled workers. This was a perfectly legitimate approach and some candidates put such ideas in a context of a full consideration of the selection process and gained very good marks.

However, one group of candidates from one centre had quite clearly discussed this approach during their preparation period. The more able students amongst the group were able to make good use of the idea of government cynicism, putting it in a wider context and considering other possibilities. However, their weaker colleagues seemed to be able to consider only this one idea and took it to extremes. Their answers lacked balance and became a tirade against government manipulation...without being able to present any real evidence in support of their case.

All centres should be aware that the examiners on this paper welcome relevant political comment on this paper, and will award due credit when it is used in a sensible geographic context. However, candidates must be discouraged from making sweeping judgements without any supporting evidence.

Question 2 (i)

The main themes that candidates discussed in their answers to this question were:

- the obvious multicultural nature of society that already exists in Bolton
- the community support that might well be available from the pre-existing African population, particularly through the church
- the availability of housing, to rent or to buy, that was comparatively cheap by UK standards
- the existence of support services that were already experienced in dealing with refugees
- the availability of places in schools for the children of the families
- the availability of college and university places for the older people
- the location of Bolton and its close links to other places with possibilities of work, education, and cultural support.

Mention was also made of the availability of unskilled, low-paid jobs although there was less obvious evidence in the AIB to support this idea. Just because a large proportion of inner city residents work in such jobs does not mean that there are necessarily a lot more available.

In addition, of course, the Council Leader's statement that 'Bolton is well known for its friendly people' was often quoted although one felt that candidates wanted to add 'Well, she would say that, wouldn't she.' They were right to treat this statement with some caution.

However, it was clear that reasonably good candidates had quite enough information to develop at least one clear point in this section, and so many were able to reach level 2 and gain 5 marks or more. The good ones were able to build up their answers by developing other points and so move towards full marks for the question.

Question 2 (ii)

This was less well answered, by the majority of candidates, than the previous question. There was a lot of general talk about cultural enrichment. Unfortunately, this often did not go beyond opening ethnic restaurants and shops selling craft goods. Moreover, people who wrote in this way often greatly exaggerated the possible impact of a group of 83 people.

Better answers generally concentrated on:

- the benefits that a group of skilled and professionally qualified people might bring to the area
- the fact that some members of the group might be willing to work for low wages as they were becoming established, thereby benefiting the local economy
- the longer term benefits of a group of younger workers in a society that has an ageing population
- the government funding that would be brought to the town to support the group
- the need to fill empty school places in the town, and the funding that extra children would bring to those schools.

Some candidates made very deliberate attempts to link their work in this question to other aspects of the specification and so to write synoptically. Of particular interest were answers that tried to link the presence of a group of dynamic, professional people with gentrification of an inner city area or with a reduction in crime in that same area. As long as such synoptic thinking was done sensibly and linked firmly to the question set these answers gained good credit. Unfortunately, some weaker candidates again exaggerated the potential affects of this fairly small group.

Question 3

There was a mass of data in the AIB for candidates to select from. One of the key skills needed for a good answer was that of selecting relevant material and developing it. Weaker candidates fell into the trap of “data waffling”. This involves copying out too many bits of data and describing them without ever explaining their relevance, nor making links and comparisons.

In fact, the mark scheme described the characteristics of a Level 1 answer as follows:

“The answer makes at least one relevant point, selecting relevant data from the AIB or map extract. However, this is not developed showing the candidate’s knowledge or understanding.

Map evidence is generalised, lacking precision. Census data is lifted but not manipulated, compared, ranked, or used in any other way.”

By contrast, the scheme described Level 2 answers thus:

“The answer selects data from the AIB and/or map extract. This is then used clearly to make relevant points about the area being considered.

There must be comparison to reach Level 2.

Elements in the answer that might raise it to this level include:

- precise, and relevant, grid references
- interpretation of evidence taken from the map
- ranking of wards for some aspect of the data
- working out percentage figures for an aspect of the data
- recognition of evidence of change
- clear spatial differentiation”.

There were many examples of good map interpretation by candidates. In particular, they compared the housing patterns in the two wards, showing good understanding of urban structures in their answers. They often attempted to link information from the map with their general theories of urban morphology. These good answers combined details about location of the wards, street patterns, open space, public buildings, main roads and public transport networks, job opportunities, probable crime patterns and so on. This often led to genuine, unforced, synoptic writing, which clearly matched the description of a Level 3 answer given in the Mark Scheme:

“The answer develops ideas in depth and detail. It shows clear understanding of the spatial variations within the town of Bolton. Aspects of the geography, observed from the map or data tables, are used in a synoptic way to build up a clear picture of the town and a clear comparison of the two areas under specific consideration.”

It should be noted that a minority of candidates anticipated Question 4 in their answers to Question 3. They wrote as though they had been asked to compare the wards from the point of view of the refugees. This was not necessary and it led to these candidates wasting some time and writing their answers from a rather narrow perspective. This just illustrates how important it is to read the questions carefully before answering them *as they have been set!*

Finally, the Principal Examiner is aware of one person who discussed an interesting point that arose from the data for employment on P13 of the AIB. The number of people who are described as 'never worked and long-term unemployed' in Derby seems to be very high at around 20% of the population. At first she had thought that this indicated a big problem in the area but then she realised that this was information from the census and it was not data collected by the Department of Employment. This did not just describe the registered unemployed but it probably also included a lot of women from Asian families who tend to stay at home rather than going out to work. This observation showed really good insight and certainly helped the Principal Examiner to understand the data which he had provided, and it proved to be one of the highlights of this marking session.

Question 4

This question shows that, despite the fact that this paper is now described as an 'Issue Evaluation', it can still include a Decision Making element. Fortunately, a large majority of candidates seemed to have been well prepared for just such an eventuality. Answers were generally good although, as mentioned previously, there was some evidence that some candidates had to hurry towards the end of their answers.

A large majority chose to settle all the group members in Derby. However, some candidates chose the other two options and made reasonable justifications of their choices. In fact some of the best answers chose to spread them throughout Bolton "but not evenly, concentrating them in the inner wards".

There were two different approaches to planning answers for this question that could be characterised as:

- present a decision at the start, and then justify it
- discuss the possible solutions and then reach a conclusion at the end.

Both of these were equally valid approaches. However, the latter was more difficult to manage. Good candidates who followed this plan often wrote excellent, very balanced answers and gained high Level 3 marks. On the other hand, weaker candidates who adopted this approach often seemed to get confused and so produced poorly structured answers.

The other approach probably produced a narrower range of answers.

The most important factor influencing most candidates' choices was the need to keep communities together in a supportive environment. This support was seen as coming from fellow group members, from Gateway and similar organisations and from the existing African community in Bolton.

Availability of cheap housing and access to employment were also important considerations for almost all candidates.

Other factors often taken into consideration included access to education, a secure and crime-free environment, access to cheap transport allowing people to travel for work etc., and the attitude of neighbouring communities to the newcomers.

The better answers usually stated criteria that had to be considered in the decision-making and then went on to see how well those criteria were met by the different options.

Some interesting dilemmas arose in some answers concerning how the data for job types should be interpreted.

If there are a lot of people in a ward who are in 'Routine occupations' does that mean there are lots of Routine jobs available in that ward, or are they already taken up?

If there are a lot of 'Higher managerial and professional occupations' in a ward does that mean the jobs are available there or that people who get such jobs can afford to move out and live in that ward whilst working elsewhere?

The way that candidates dealt with dilemmas like these had a large bearing on their marks. The highest marks – as always - went to candidates who understood the figures well and could use them in a sensible geographical context. In particular, these high marks went to people who could see Bolton as a whole rather than looking too closely at individual bits of information about individual wards. They were aware that people might live in one place and travel within the town or within the Greater Manchester conurbation for work.

Taking this one stage further some good candidates also put the refugees' present situation in a longer term context and explained that whatever happens when the people first settle in the town will not necessarily last forever. Long-term solutions to their problems might be very different from their immediate responses.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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