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GCSE

# Geography A

90302H Human Geography  
Report on the Examination

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## General

The paper produced a good range of marks yielding appropriate differentiation between candidates of varying ability. Most candidates responded to the range of question types and stimulus material and wrote in continuous prose of a standard commensurate with the ability range at which the paper is targeted. As on the Foundation tier and has been the case for a few years, the most popular questions remain 1 and 6 with 2 close behind. These three also proved to be the most popular combination. There was an even spread between questions 4 and 5, with question 3 infrequently attempted.

Command words and an understanding of what they have to do to respond remains a key issue for improving performance among otherwise well prepared candidates. Centres' attention is drawn to the command words document available in the GCSE Geography A area of the AQA website. There should be an expectation that any of the command words in the list might appear in the question paper and candidates would be well served by repetition and practice of the different demands.

'Discuss' was used in two of the 8 mark questions, in questions 1 and 5. Candidates need to understand the command and be aware that simply stating 'success'/'failure' or 'advantage'/'disadvantage' is not automatically discussion. There should be some attempt to offer comment, indicate key points and then bring to a conclusion. Similarly 'explain', as used in questions 2 and 4, needs direction towards to the key concept referred to in the question in order to be fully reasoning so that the candidates are showing how their chosen information supports their argument; it is not enough to write lots of descriptive detail and leave the examiner to work out their import.

Skills of application remain an area that some centres and candidates could address further. There is a need to read and consider the question to select appropriate case studies and particular information from within those case studies. For example 'use figure x and your own knowledge', which made a number of appearances in the paper, and 'with the help of' which encourages the use of the candidates' own learning and gives suggestive content in the information provided by the resources.

This is equally the case where the resource is short, such as a quote or newspaper headline as in questions 6 and 3 respectively. Here again there is a need to marshal information in a certain way for full credit. The 6 mark questions at the start of each question in section B were consistently some of the weakest across the paper precisely because candidates failed to fully utilise the resources and / or read what the question was asking them to explain. Map skills, particularly OS maps, were thus a notable weakness on this year's responses.

Subjectively, many examiners reported that there were more candidates this year than last who would have benefitted from the structure and support of the Foundation tier questions in their quest for a benchmark grade. This needs careful consideration from centres. Only the best candidates secured 3 SPaG marks as they were the ones most in command of their language and able to use it to fluently and carefully express ideas.

Overall, despite the issues above, which can all be addressed, the significant majority of candidates were again well-prepared, exposed to a geography comprising of real places and whose geographical knowledge was a pleasure to read.

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## SECTION A

### Question 1 Changing Urban Environments

**1(a)(i)** saw many candidates gaining two marks and demonstrating that they knew what structure meant in population terms. Most also referred to the different sectors of the population using the correct terminology e.g, ‘young dependents’. The third mark proved elusive for many however as they either did not use figures to show direct reference to Figure 1 or quoted inaccurate figures. The simple expedient of a ruler, which candidates seemed not to have or not to use, would have made reading the graph much easier. In **1(a)(ii)** most gave sound reasons and realised that references to female employment, the advent of contraception were valid in the time frame of the data given, as was awareness of their own cost to their parents discouraging larger families. Whilst many wrote of increasing life expectancy through medical advances, few identified the effect of the ageing ‘baby boomer’ generation and some clearly able candidates did not link their points well to the changes in structure. **1(b)(i)** saw most correct but a significant opting for stage 3 where they seemed to confuse falling birth rate with total population. **1(b)(ii)** was answered to Level 1 by the majority of candidates who perceived the impact of an ageing population, but far fewer were able to link their ideas to how economic development might be affected such as a declining tax base or the need to spend on care rather than economic investment. **1(c)(i)** was well answered by almost all, as was **1(c)(ii)** where the majority were able to draw the link between education and ultimately fewer children. China’s population policies were well learnt and put forward in frequently good detail in **1(d)**, although a few wasted time and space describing the policy or providing a rationale for it, showing the need to focus on the question from the outset. Most candidates wrote about successes and failures to secure access to Level 2 though this was generally quite one-sided with the many successes of China’s policy and the structure it yielded often limited to the avoidance of famine. Only the best were able to really discuss and apply some comparative comment and judgement as the command requires to reach Level 3.

### Question 2 Changing Urban Environments

**2(a)(i)** saw most candidates gain at least one mark but fewer were able to connect their comment to the environment, with many not specifying the type of pollution or writing generally about global warming. In **2(a)(ii)** only about half of the candidates correctly selected ‘topological’, a type of map listed in the specification and which should have been known for a straightforward mark. **2(a)(iii)** was often well answered with many able to make good developed use of the figure, usually through reference to cycling, and their own knowledge. Sadly some obviously able candidates either referred only to the figure or used lots of their own knowledge with case studies but made no use of the figure and therefore remained in Level 1. Candidates must practice this skill of responding to all the demands of a question. Similarly in **2(b)** some merely listed points from the graph without using it to explain; some comment was necessary for success. **2(c)(i)** was well answered by the majority with appropriate labels, however there were some who were careless and didn’t use arrows, or whose arrows pointed towards the label and not the feature and thereby threw away marks. It is also important that candidates are aware that credit can only be given for what is there and not speculation over what is absent such as ‘no sanitation’ / ‘no electricity supply’. **2(c)(ii)** yielded many good answers generally focusing on either disease in the water or injury from collapsing homes. In **2(d)** there was some good use made of case study detail, almost exclusively Curitiba/BedZed, despite this not being an explicit question requirement to reach Level 2. However, as elsewhere on this paper far fewer reached Level 3 as they were not able to use this information to draw explicit links to sustainability.

### Question 3 Changing Rural Environments

**3(a)(i)** produced good responses where candidates developed their ideas well, with hedgerow removal and eutrophication being common areas of focus. **3(a)(ii)** saw candidates unduly challenged by what should be a straightforward command to 'outline' as they were able to make a statement but less able to develop it for the second mark. This is again a lack of exam technique acting as a barrier to achievement for some students. **3(b)** was generally answered well on increased traffic congestion, loss of farmland and disturbance of locals, although a significant minority failed to score as their answer focused on the impacts on the CBD rather than the rural-urban fringe. There were very few incorrect answers to **3(c)(i)** indicating that candidates are clearly able to give four figure grid references, so it was a surprise that so few did so for **3(c)(ii)** where answers were mostly generic with little or no reference to the OS map; this led to a low overall standard of response for this question. As question 6 will also show, such map skills seem a notable issue with candidates this year. The causes of rural decline seemed well understood in **3(c)(iii)** where good case study information on locations such as the Lake District and Snowdonia was well used, with most able to develop links in their arguments. Where candidates did not score well here it was for not making adequate reference to one of the aspects referred to in the figure. There was little middle ground in the answers to **3(d)** where candidates either grasped the resource and the concepts it was chosen to illustrate or gained some basic credit for the community idea without being able to develop this. They needed to make a link to rural support such as the idea of a social enterprise or provision of services, e.g. internet or dry cleaning, which might be hard to obtain in rural areas and which was the focus of the question.

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## SECTION B

### Question 4 The Development Gap

The need to comparatively use the two maps in **4(a)(i)** meant that the majority of candidates failed to move beyond basic points that simply described differences and lacked clear understanding. This was disappointing especially since some countries that were potentially useful in formulating an answer had been indicated on the resources to aid the candidates and this is a clear and explicit part of the specification on this topic. The best candidates, and there were some, showed that success clearly lies in fully engaging with the figures and drawing exemplars from them to make strong conclusions. Most candidates had little more than a basic idea for **4(a)(ii)** most focusing on why the quality of life would simply be better in richer countries vs poorer ones; this missed the point of the question about perception and value judgements, with quality of life often confused with standard of living. **4(b)** was well answered by a minority of candidates, with most only able to lift basic ideas from the passage and re-write them without showing understanding. The best candidates were able to link ideas to the future development of the country and those that did so often reached the top of the level as they made a number of well-developed points. Candidates seemed to find **4(c)(i)** difficult with a number of misunderstandings and inaccuracies about the graph, not many referring to the units and not grasping the link between the two lines, such that many scored one mark but few were able to gain a second. **4(c)(ii)** seemed equally split between those who knew what trading groups were and how they operated to easily gain two marks and those who did not, often confusing it with fair trade, and therefore struggled. In **4(d)** candidates found the social factors more difficult than economic and a significant minority missed the 'global' aspect required, determined to utilise their two European country comparison to little effect. However, there were some excellent answers which focused on factors such as primary product dependency and the trade gap, and also perpetual conflict limiting social development in many regions of the world so that they are left behind as others progress.

### Question 5 Globalisation

**5(a)(i)**, as is the theme for these questions, was poorly answered by the majority. Not many used their own knowledge in their answer or made the link between some countries causing the problem and others bearing the brunt; many simply described the effects shown on Figure 13a, making a series of Level 1 points. Those who recognised the link between the figures and agreements such as the Kyoto protocol did well. Those who chose a good local action in **5(a)(ii)**, such as buying local food, frequently went on to score full marks as they linked this to a series of creditworthy points. However many struggled without a suitable local action. **5(b)(i)** produced almost universally accurate and well-drawn graphs, unlike **5(b)(ii)** where many candidates simply re-worded the question and few linked back to the graph. **5(b)(iii)** tended to be answered quite well, more so on increased wealth than technological advance, with many candidates making linked statements that were explained clearly. Those who named types of technology and their demand for power tended to do best. **5(c)** produced greater variety in choice of case study than other similar questions which meant that some of the answers were interesting and informative to read. Most candidates were able to give a range of advantages and disadvantages and where there was imbalance it was in favour of disadvantages. Many applied these well to their choice of TNC for high marks and where candidates remained in Level 2 it was because their answers were generic.

## Question 6 Tourism

In **6(a)** once again, the clear world choropleth map presented a real challenge. Most candidates simply described the map and the values therein without any application or consideration of the difference between value in raw terms and economic importance. A few even assumed that more earnings meant more importance or more attractions and tourists. The best answers knew detailed facts and figures about the % of the GDP that is earned from tourism in some contrasting countries and used this to good effect to support what they saw on the map. **6(b)(i)** was either known or not, although a few picked up a mark for some idea of environmental protection. It is clear that candidates need a better knowledge of key geographical terminology if they are not to throw away straightforward marks for recall. Unlike the largely well labelled equivalent in question 2, **6(b)(ii)** was often poorly answered. Common errors were arrows vaguely ending in open space, labelling the absence of things, vague ideas not relating to the picture and some who had clearly not looked at the colour picture on the insert before attempting the question. Candidates also need to focus on the command word as annotation clearly requires development of a comment. The few good answers correctly perceived features such as the unobtrusive colour/size of the tents, the raised platforms and the limited number of tourists visible. **6(b)(iii)** was much better answered and well understood with any errors generally arising from careless reading of the question and outlining environmental effects. **6(c)(i)** was possibly the weakest question on the paper with many answers being little more than a list of features such as the number of churches, with some candidates believing that there was a market for large numbers of religious tourists, or counting car parks and very few Level 2 answers seen. Candidates needed to use the map fully to link this to the development of the resort/national park. Instead many confused those features which would cause visitors to come and those built afterwards to support tourists. Grid references or simple use of the map such as the southerly orientation of the beach or the undulations (not mountains) suggested by the contours were notable for their absence. Candidates who focused on a coastal resort in **6(c)(ii)** generally did better than those who used a national park as they grasped the concept of future prosperity better, some even linking this to the Butler Model. Blackpool and the Lake District were by far the most common but others did feature and centres should note that a local example can often have more meaning and easier recall for candidates. Too many of the national park answers purely described management strategies without suggesting, for example, that hardwearing footpaths will mean that the feature or activity that draws people to visit is preserved and so people will keep coming and spending money in local shops/accommodation into the future. The very best answers were well directed towards the idea of prosperity with some even reasoning that the failure of some resorts to reinvent themselves and invest, or of national parks to deal with negative issues, has meant that they have taken an economic turn for the worse. Such answers were a great pleasure to see as they illustrated perfectly how the central route to success always lies in engaging with the question.

## Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

## Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)