

GCE A Level Examiners' Report

Geography
A Level
Summer 2025

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Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each component.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (eduqas.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Executive Summary

Candidate performance across all 4 components of the A level in 2025 was encouraging and the overall mean marks higher on each component than they were in 2024. Centres are to be warmly congratulated for their hard work in preparing their candidates.

In **Component 1**, candidates effectively used case studies, particularly in essays, though application of place-based knowledge in 8-mark questions needs improvement. Students demonstrated strong understanding of key concepts, especially in the Changing Places section. Higher-quality scripts reflected deeper AO1 knowledge and understanding, while others showed only general grasp of topics. Resource-based responses often lacked analytical depth, relying more on description than pattern analysis. Diagrams in the physical geography section, when effectively used and annotated, enhanced essay responses. Overall, while conceptual understanding was evident, analytical skills and specific application of knowledge require further development to improve performance across question types.

The **Component 2** assessment was accessible, with many candidates scoring well across all items. However, top marks remained challenging, requiring quality over quantity, especially in 5-mark questions and tasks assessing geographical skills and understanding. Optional essay questions allowed confident responses while still stretching the most able, particularly in AO2. Despite time constraints, candidates often wrote extensively, achieving high AO1 marks. The 21st Century Challenge questions were inclusive, enabling demonstration of all assessment objectives. Resources were clear, and most candidates used them effectively. Performance varied mainly by depth of knowledge and sophistication of evaluation, with mean scores for Questions 9 and 10 around 20/30.

Component 3 remains accessible to students despite its breadth and essay demands, with few rubric errors but some question misinterpretations. Timing improved, though coherence sometimes suffered. Strong differentiation was evident, with many candidates showing deep knowledge (AO1) and analytical skill (AO2). Essay structure and planning were generally sound, with increasing use of effective diagrams, though quality maps were rare. Overly descriptive case studies often lacked focus, and case study selection remains an area for development. Centres encouraging up-to-date research are to be commended. Geographical vocabulary improved, supporting synoptic links. However, some candidates still wrote illegibly, and further refinement in essay introductions and in producing summative conclusions is recommended.

Centres are commended for their effective administration in **Component 4**, with most submitting annotated work, proposal forms, and updated declaration forms correctly. However, moderation was delayed in some cases due to missing or outdated forms, particularly those lacking the 2023 AI reference. Accurate candidate numbers must be recorded consistently across all documents, especially as future submissions will be electronic. Proposal quality varied; some titles were too broad, poorly linked to the specification, or lacked coherent enquiry structure. The most successful proposals are those where the candidates identify a single bullet point of content in the specification as a focus for their investigation. This allows them to develop a coherent line of enquiry around a central theory, concept or process.

GEOGRAPHY

GCE A level

Summer 2025

COMPONENT 1: CHANGING LANDSCAPES AND CHANGING PLACES

Overview of the Component

- The paper assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3. AO3 is assessed through resource-based questions whilst AO1 and AO2 are assessed as short-answer questions and essays.
- Candidates can choose between Coastal and Glaciated Landscapes whilst all candidates must answer questions on Changing Places.

General performance

- Many candidates showed an effective use of case studies to support their answers, especially in essays. Application of their place-based knowledge could be improved in responses to 8-mark questions.
- Students showed a firm grasp of key concepts, especially in the Changing Places section.
- Resource based responses would benefit from more analysis of pattern rather than simple description of data.
- Better scripts showed a depth of knowledge and understanding but elsewhere, grasp of the topics assessed was general.
- The use of diagrams in the physical geography section was sound and supported answers to the essay questions.
- In 2025, the mean mark on the paper increased by 5 marks and centres are to be congratulated for preparing their students effectively.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Coastal Landscapes

- Q.1 (a)** This question assessed the candidate's ability to analyse data showing the relationship between wave height and rate of cliff retreat. In general candidates were able to access the information shown in the scatter graph. In (a) (i) the majority of candidates were well prepared, understanding the meaning of range and able to provide an acceptable estimate. The mark scheme did not demand units, but a number did provide the metrics of m/yr., and this practice should be encouraged. In (a) (ii) candidates mostly identified or gave a description of a positive correlation and supported this with comment on the strength of the correlation or reference to anomalies. Answers were less successful in their identification of a valid statistical test in (a) (iii). Many students incorrectly named Chi Squared as the statistical test and where they accurately named spearman's rank, they did not earn the second mark as they made no reference to the nature of data or comment on how the test allowed measurement of the strength of the relationship.
- (b)** Many candidates were not confident with the relevant information required for Focus box 1.1.4 in the specification and answers lacked balance between mineral composition and jointing. The link between jointing and rates of cliff retreat was developed more successfully with candidates recognising the ways by which jointing influenced rates of cliff retreat. Better answers were often based on places that had been studied such as the Holderness and Jurassic coastlines where candidates adopted a comparative approach to examine the link between mineral composition rates of weathering, rock strength and differential retreat. In some cases, candidates regressed to a discussion of hard and soft rocks and did not address the specific role of mineral composition or jointing.

- Q.2 (a)** The resource for this question was a field sketch of the impacts of erosion on a part of the Holderness coast and the majority of candidates were able to access the information within the sketch. An understanding of command words was important in addressing the question and there were still uncertainties about how to analyse information presented in this qualitative format. Many candidates could confidently grasp the requirement of the question to use the resource in a sustained and specific way, linking the potential losses that may result from erosion to both individuals and communities. Most candidates were able to do more than simply lift from the source although a small minority did take this approach. It was good to see many using the specification to structure their answers with comment on the negative social and economic impacts of coastal erosion. There was some drift with candidates explaining why the coastline is suffering rapid erosion as many centres use this coastline as a case study in their teaching.
- (b)** On the whole this was a well answered question with students providing well balanced answers containing detailed knowledge and understanding of both waves. There was frequently a strong use of terminology in candidate responses. Answers were often supported with well annotated diagrams that illustrated some of the characteristics of both wave types. In some cases, candidates were able to give located examples to add further depth to their answers. Occasionally answers tended to drift off the main subject and focus to an excessive extent on the landforms created by the different waves rather than the actual characteristics of the waves.

Q.3 This was a popular question that allowed candidates to select from landforms of erosion and/or deposition to discuss the role of different time scales. AO1 content looked for a knowledge and understanding of coastal processes and their link to the formation of two landforms at different time scales. AO2 invited candidates to examine the importance of short-, medium- and long-term time periods in the context of the chosen landforms. There were some strong answers that focused on two located coastal landforms often supported with reference to places that candidates have studied. Candidates who addressed the question confidently had breadth and depth to their answers, often taking the comparative approach between short-, medium- and long-term variations in coastal processes and their impact on the development of landforms. Some candidates used time scale as their essay structure and addressed the link between processes operating at different time scales and landform characteristics. Others selected landform as the framework of their essay and discussed time scale through landform. Popular choices of landforms included spits, tombolo's, bars, headlands, stacks and stumps and these were developed in the context of short- and medium-term time scales. Answers that examined landform development over millennia usually commented on eustatic and isostatic changes of sea level with reference to raised beaches, platforms and cliffs in Scotland and rias in Cornwall or Pembrokeshire. Some candidates referenced the importance of other factors such as human activity (management strategies on the Holderness coastline) and longer-term processes such as climate change. There were some good responses that examined a wide variety of time scales and developed their importance throughout the answer. In some cases, however assessment was simplistic with statements just reflecting on whether the time scale was important or not.

Q.4 This was also a popular question. AO1 content looked for an examination of processes and landforms in low energy coastal environments whilst AO2 credit was given to comment on how processes led to the formation of distinctive landforms selected. Candidate responses included a wide range of landforms and included beaches, spits, sand dunes, salt marshes and mangroves. There were some strong and sophisticated responses frequently focused on longshore drift and spit creation with popular case study choices of Spurn Head and Hurst Castle spit. The second most popular choice of landforms was sand dunes where candidates successfully explained why low energy coastlines create distinctive landforms with strong knowledge and understanding of depositional processes, wave energy, currents and transportation. There were some good answers that examined the relative importance of different processes that led to the distinctive nature of landforms within low energy environments. These frequently approached the importance of marine, aeolian, fluvial and biotic processes with some acknowledging human intervention and its impact citing the interruption of natural processes. In less successful answers candidates struggled to use appropriate examples and as a result constrained the AO1 marks that were awarded due to no located case study examples to add depth and development to their answers. Some candidates drifted into a discussion about high energy coastlines and made a comparison between the two which was not the focus of the question. Some responses simply outlined the formation of selected features but did not give attention to why the processes made the landforms distinctive.

Section A: Glaciated Landscapes

- Q.5 (a)** This question assessed the candidate's ability to analyse data showing the relationship between glacier length and terminal moraine height. In general candidates were able to access the information shown in the scatter graph. In **(a) (i)** the majority of candidates were well prepared, understanding the meaning of range and able to provide an acceptable estimate. The mark scheme did not demand units, but a number did provide the metrics of km, and this practice should be encouraged. In **(a) (ii)** many candidates identified or gave a description of a positive correlation although the relationship was not as evident as in Figure 1. Many answers commented on the strength of the correlation or made reference to anomalies. Answers were less successful in their identification of a valid statistical test in **(a) (iii)**. Many students incorrectly named Chi Squared as the statistical test and where they accurately named spearman's rank, they did not earn the second mark as they made no reference to the nature of data or comment on how the test allowed measurement of the strength of the relationship.
- (b)** Knowledge of the different types of moraines was evident in many responses and frequent reference was made to terminal, recessional, lateral, medial and push types identified in the specification. Some candidates also displayed knowledge and understanding of the characteristics and formation of ground moraines formed during glacial advance and retreat. Answers made regular reference to the glacial budget linking this to accumulation and ablation at a range of time scales, using this concept to explain advance and retreat. A number of candidates produced good quality responses that were able to link the characteristics of different types of moraines to processes of formation. Often these were organised to link the features of the moraines identified to advance or retreat and supported by case study materials from the Lake District, Yorkshire, Eryri, the Scottish Highlands and interestingly the Cromer Ridge. Diagrams were often used to clarify the formation and arrangement of moraines. Less effective responses gave information about the formation of identified moraines but structurally more casual and could have been fruitfully linked to the advance and retreat of glaciers.

- Q.6 (a)** The resource for this question was a field sketch of the Llanberis Pass a glaciated valley in Gwynedd and the majority of candidates were able to access the information within the sketch. An understanding of command words was important in addressing the question and there were still uncertainties about how to analyse information presented in this qualitative format. Many answers opted for a rewrite of the information shown in the resource with the addition of an explanation of the formation of the features shown. Some candidates were unsure of what constituted a post glacial process and instead discussed the formation of peri-glacial landforms that were not included in the sketch. There were however a number of answers that displayed a confident grasp of the requirements of the question and discussed how the processes identified in the resource changed the valley. These answers referred to changes in the valley caused by weathering, mass movement and fluvial action and dealt with the shape of the valley profile, the erosion and reworking of glacial deposits and the infilling of the ribbon lake.
- (b)** This question was a basic knowledge-based assessment of the material in focus box 1.2.4 of the specification. There were a number of candidates who displayed a confident grasp of the characteristics of ice sheets and valley glaciers and were able to discuss their size, shape, location and movement. Although it was not required many answers were organised to provide a comparative outline of the two ice masses. Some candidates concentrated too much on the nature of warm-based and cold-based glaciers and so missed the focus of the question. Others focused on the landforms associated with the different ice masses and produced responses that tended to be unbalanced in favour of valley glaciers.
- Q.7** This was overwhelmingly the most popular of the essays and allowed the candidates to examine a wide variety of appropriate landforms. AO1 content examined the candidate's knowledge and understanding of processes of glacial erosion and their role in the formation of the two selected landforms whilst AO2 examined the role of these processes either relative to each other or other processes or factors. The main landforms selected were cirques, glacial troughs, roche moutonnée and crag and tail with other erosional landforms making addressed by a minority of candidates. Some answers included depositional landforms such as moraines, eskers and drumlins which were accepted but gave limited opportunity to examine erosional processes in detail, although there were some imaginative and innovative responses that achieved this goal. A number of candidates presented well organised and evaluative answers that were based upon case studies examined as part of their studies or fieldwork experience. Cwm Idwal and Nant Ffrancon in Eryri were frequently analysed as was the Red Tarn in the Lake District with answers outlining how different erosional processes had formed selected features, comparing these with the contribution of weathering and deposition. Many answers examined geology and orientation and thus allowed an integrated evaluation of importance opening up AO2 credit throughout the essay. Candidates used diagrams to support their writing which is to be commended, with many explaining the development of selected landforms in a series of sequential and well annotated illustrations. This holistic approach based on a specific location was successful, but others discussed landforms separated by distance equally effectively.

- Q.8** There were few responses to this question, and it was not as popular as its sister question in the coastal landscapes option. As in Question 4 AO1 content looked for an examination of processes and landforms in a named environment, here lowland glacial landscapes. AO2 credit was given to comment on how processes led to the formation of distinctive landforms selected. Most of the candidates who selected this question based their responses on depositional landforms such as eskers, kames, drumlins and features of sandurs linking these to fluvioglacial and moving ice processes. Reference to erosional features in lowlands was limited but a number did refer to glacial scour and knock and lochan landscapes in NW Scotland and Scandinavia. Unfortunately, the opportunity to emphasise the distinctive nature of erosional and depositional landforms in specific lowland locations was not often taken.

Section B: Changing Places

- Q.9 (a)** This question assessed the candidate's ability to analyse data showing the proportion of FDI projects in UK towns and cities. There were some clear and concise answers that recognised that the resource showed proportion and an analysis of trends over time was required. These responses outlined the relative decline of the proportion of investment in towns and the growth of core cities, the greatest decline in large towns and the fluctuating nature of investment in all settlements. Candidates supported their observations with data extracted from the resource. Classically many candidates described the individual lines representing different types of towns and cities, often in detail. This was however not the analysis required by the question and was instead a basic description and thus gained limited credit.
- (b)** The better answers frequently examined past industrial based cities and developed the ways in which foreign companies could help to overcome the issues associated with deindustrialisation. This inevitably involved comment on issues, but some answers gave this aspect too much attention and this resulted in lengthy or unbalanced responses. It was pleasing to see that many candidates used local examples to illustrate their answers were able to name and discuss the impact of named foreign companies or FDI investment in named projects and places in truly deindustrialised places. Knowledge of the range of help offered was broad and although most focused on job creation, skills and capital other aspects were discussed such as infrastructure, reimagining and diversification. The emphasis was very much related to the case studies chosen. The majority of answers were based on urban places but there were some who looked at rural places where the extraction of raw materials had declined. Less effective answers discussed the redevelopment of post-industrial space with no reference to foreign investment or cited British companies or funding from local or national government. The use of examples from outside the UK was perfectly acceptable but a number drifted into investment made into places that did not suffer from de-industrialisation. Some were confused by the question and wrote about how companies, British or foreign, could de-industrialise an area.

- Q.10 (a)** The resource plotted the changing places characteristics of a small town in Northern Ireland and asked candidates to describe the impacts on the lives of people who live there. The best responses gained credit by noting the shifts in employment levels and sectors, changes in skill sets required, the impacts of tourists with traffic congestion, possible changing house prices, quality of infrastructure, aesthetics etc. However, candidates often simply described the changing place characteristics shown in the resource with the more basic focused upon employment numbers without reference to, or empathy with, the 'lives' element of the question.
- (b)** The better answers were rooted in place-based exemplification where primary industries such as slate mines, the fishing industry, coal mines (in rural areas), quarries and farming employment had changed. There was a general understanding of the role played by globalisation with some citing poor working conditions and poor safety standards abroad making primary products cheaper; so some good lateral thinking taking place. In a minority of cases candidates thought this was because the primary industries had moved abroad in the same way that production of manufacturing has globalised with the closure of factories. There was often a good understanding of the post-productive countryside as mentioned in the specification and the role of mechanisation and automation was discussed. There were some excellent examples of candidates naming machines or farming systems which reduced labour-intensive agriculture. Many answers referred to sectoral change as outlined by the Clark-Fisher model. Although a number reflected on the impact of counter-urbanisation and housing costs in rural areas many did not effectively link this to declining employment in primary industry. A number did not focus on primary industry.
- Q.11** This was a popular question. AO1 content examined the candidate's knowledge and understanding of the process of rebranding in urban places and its impacts on the social and economic character of the selected place(s). AO2 allowed discussion and evaluation of these impacts relative to each other in one or more places. Good answers were usually based on detailed case studies such as Liverpool docks, Brindley Place Birmingham, parts of Manchester, Gloucester docks and Stratford in east London. Many candidates explained the nature of the rebranding e.g. heritage, sport, retail, arts and culture and were able to discuss the impacts on social and economic characteristics with reference to what the places selected were like before. There was some excellent evidence to support the candidates' points especially where comparative statistics were given for before the rebrand and after. Rebranding is a specific planned process, and gentrification could be an impact indeed some candidates did effectively word their case studies in such a way. Unfortunately, a number of candidates tried to fit their unmodified case studies of gentrification into their answers and drifted from the focus of the question. Some answers were unbalanced, and candidates spent too much time explaining the process of rebranding in their chosen locations and gave only cursory comment on the social and economic elements of the question. This meant that it was difficult to award high levels of AO2 credit. In some cases, the urban focus was missing with candidates writing about the rebranding of Pilton village through the Glastonbury Festival or the Eden project in Cornwall.

Q.12 This was a popular question and allowed candidates to display their knowledge and understanding of the factors that encourage the growth of quaternary industry clusters and evaluate their relative importance. Good answers were based on place-based exemplification and showed excellent knowledge of the actual quaternary industries in named clusters. A wide range of quaternary clusters were used not only the more expected areas such as Silicon Roundabout, Silicon Valley or the Cambridge Science Park but also ones in places such as India and China which were equally valid. All answers referred to the proximity of universities and skilled workers and many good responses examined infrastructure through ultra-fast broadband access as well as the usual comments about motorway and airport access. Lifestyle and working environment were seen by many as important. Many candidates assessed the relative importance of the different locational factors which was a legitimate approach, and others recognised that there were factors not solely locational which encouraged growth. Many good responses were organised around a consideration of different named clusters and an examination of the importance of different and similar factors in growth of each place. This allowed an evaluation of combinations of factors rather than looking at individual influences. The growth element of the question was a feature of good answers and allowed comments to be made about how the importance of factors changes with time.

GEOGRAPHY

GCE A level

Summer 2025

COMPONENT 2: GLOBAL SYSTEMS AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Overview of the Component

A significant number of candidates scored highly across all items on the paper, indicating that this was an accessible assessment which successfully enabled candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

However, the highest marks for both short-answer and extended writing tasks remained purposely challenging to attain. While many candidates achieved 3 or 4 marks on the 5-mark questions, often through the sheer volume of content provided, the fifth mark typically reflected a higher level of quality. This applied both to questions requiring geographical skills (e.g. Questions 2a and 5a) and those testing knowledge and understanding (e.g. Questions 1a iii and 5b).

The optional essay pairs (Questions 3, 4, 7, and 8) performed as intended. They focused on themes that allowed candidates to write confidently and knowledgeably, while still presenting sufficient stretch and challenge for the most able, especially in respect of the attainment of AO2 marks. Despite time constraints, many candidates wrote extensively, often producing responses spanning 3 or more pages. In many instances, candidates achieved full or near-full AO1 marks due to the breadth of content covered.

As in previous series, the 21st Century Challenge questions were designed to be accessible to the full ability range. The assessment remains candidate-friendly, offering clear and structured opportunities for students to demonstrate competence across all three assessment objectives: data analysis, recall of knowledge and evaluative skills. The resources provided with this year's questions were clear and straightforward. Candidates across the ability range generally navigated them effectively, incorporated their own knowledge and arrived at reasoned conclusions. The main differentiators in performance were the depth or breadth of additional knowledge applied and the sophistication of the final evaluation. The mean mark for both Questions 9 and 10 was approximately 20 out of 30.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Global Systems

- Q.1 (a) (i)** Candidates who read both the question and the command word carefully generally performed well on this task. The question required candidates to provide a sensible estimate of the resources in Australia by making a comparison with other countries. A response identifying 14 as a reasonable estimate met the requirements (according to the mark scheme, acceptable answers fell within the range of 13.5 to 14.5). Some candidates engaged in unnecessarily complex calculations, offering responses with multiple decimal places. Such precision was not required, as the command word "estimate" indicated that a detailed calculation was not necessary. Centres are advised to emphasise to future candidates that when the command word is "estimate," a sensible approximation is expected, rather than elaborate computations.
- (ii)** At the upper end of the mark range, candidates demonstrated strong data literacy skills by manipulating the information in concise and insightful ways. For instance, some effectively highlighted the rapid depletion of China's coal reserves, noting that the country is consuming approximately 1/35 of its resources annually. In contrast, candidates at the lower end of the mark range engaged with the data in a superficial manner. Their responses typically involved listing the annual coal production figures for each country, occasionally identifying the highest and lowest values. However, this approach fell short of fully addressing the question, which required an analysis of the variation in the rate at which countries are depleting *their own* resources. Overall, the question served as an effective discriminator between those with well-developed analytical skills and those limited to basic data recognition.
- (iii)** At the upper end of the mark range, candidates produced well-developed responses that addressed *multiple* carbon stores and effectively integrated subject-specific terminology. High-scoring answers typically demonstrated understanding through the accurate use of terms such as sequestration, diffusion, and carbonation (among others). Candidates awarded full marks often explained the likely impact of fossil fuel combustion on the atmospheric carbon store prior to discussing changes in oceanic and biomass storage. In contrast, responses at the lower end of the mark range generally earned two marks by providing more basic observations, for example, suggesting that reduced coal reserves would lead to increased atmospheric carbon and global warming. Centres preparing future cohorts for this question are encouraged to emphasise the importance of engaging with multiple carbon *stores* (the plural form appears in the question) and incorporating appropriate specialist vocabulary to access higher marks.

- Q.2 (a)** The majority of candidates achieved a Band 2 mark or higher, aided by the relatively straightforward nature of the task and the availability of a wide range of quotable data. Candidates achieving marks at the top of Band 2 typically demonstrated awareness of greater variation within the 2022 data set and supported their observations with relevant data points. Those attaining Band 3 marks generally identified the months showing the most significant differences, thereby providing greater and more insightful comparisons. The strongest responses were succinct, maintaining a consistent focus on data comparison across both individual months and the overall trend from January to July in the two data sets. In contrast, some candidates produced extended responses, approaching a full page in length, which failed to reach Band 3. These answers often included excessive data description, which diluted the clarity and coherence of the comparison (whereby a reader “can’t see the wood for the trees”). In such cases, the key comparative insights were obscured by unnecessary detail. It is recommended that centres using this question for classroom practice consider implementing a word limit (e.g. 100 words). Developing the ability to present concise and focused data analysis is a valuable skill for both written examinations and the Non-Examined Assessment (NEA).
- (b)** A common reason for candidates failing to achieve a Band 3 mark was a lack of sufficient attention to the phrase “seasonal and longer term”. In many cases, candidates did not explicitly refer to these terms, instead leaving it to the examiner to infer whether, for instance, references to El Niño were intended to illustrate longer-term climatic variations or were being used to exaggerate seasonal variability. In contrast, higher-scoring candidates typically provided well-balanced responses that clearly distinguished between seasonal and long-term variations. The latter was most often exemplified by human-induced climate change, while seasonal variation was generally addressed with appropriate reference to annual weather patterns. Candidates at the lower end of the mark range typically demonstrated limited understanding of the causes of seasonal precipitation variation in the UK. A common, oversimplified response was that “there is more precipitation during some of the year because it is winter when it rains more,” without further elaboration. At a minimum, candidates might have shown awareness of the role of frontal rainfall during winter months. Additionally, some candidates showed an insecure understanding of the phrase “a drainage basin receives”, misinterpreting it as steer to explore seasonal variations in interception and infiltration - rather than the actual volume of precipitation arriving from the sky in a basin. While partial credit was awarded for outlining of infiltration variability, candidates who did not address the temporal variation in precipitation itself (regardless of interception) were unlikely to access the highest mark band.

- Q.3** Candidates choosing this question generally responded with clarity, demonstrating a sound understanding of both themes before arriving at the sensible conclusion that permafrost thawing poses a greater threat due to the global scale of the challenges it presents. The average mark awarded for this question was approximately 13. This level of performance typically reflected candidates who had studied one aquifer case study in detail and possessed a secure understanding of permafrost thawing and the associated release of methane, along with its implications for climate change.

At the higher end of the mark range, candidates displayed a more advanced grasp of climatic feedback loops, high-emission scenarios and the accompanying planetary-scale risks. High-scoring responses frequently included nuanced and detailed discussions of aquifer depletion, emphasising the local socio-economic and environmental consequences associated with it.

Notably, the strongest responses sometimes challenged the prevailing view by arguing that aquifer depletion represents the more immediate and severe threat. These answers were distinguished by their sophisticated reasoning: they highlighted the immediate existential risks to some people and ecosystems in regions facing acute water scarcity, in contrast to the slower, more diffuse onset of permafrost thawing. The best examples of this approach provided a compelling justification when framing aquifer depletion as the greater threat at a *local* scale.

- Q.4** This question was less frequently chosen compared with Question 3, though the average mark of 12 was only slightly lower. Most candidates demonstrated an ability to apply their knowledge and understanding effectively to produce a clear and direct evaluation.

The most common approach involved arguing that high rainfall leading to overland flow can result in significant carbon losses through various mechanisms. In contrast, candidates also noted that in low-altitude, low-relief peatland environments, high rainfall often leads to waterlogging and the anaerobic conditions that promote carbon storage rather than loss.

Candidates who successfully developed these contrasting points and supported their responses with appropriate subject-specific terminology typically achieved Band 3. This was due to their detailed explanation of processes and a balanced evaluation, acknowledging that the statement is not universally applicable.

Section B: Global Governance

- Q.5 (a)** Most candidates approached this task with a high level of competence. The data provided were accessible, enabling less able candidates to extract and list information while also allowing more able candidates to manipulate and analyse the material effectively. The strongest responses demonstrated *synthesis* of the two data sources, particularly by identifying that over half of all global internally displaced persons (IDPs) are in Ukraine. This analytical point can only be substantiated by integrating information from both resources. Centres preparing future candidates are encouraged to use this question and its accompanying mark scheme as a valuable exemplar of how multiple data sets can be combined to produce a more insightful analysis.
- (b)** Examiners accepted a broad range of interpretations regarding what constitutes a political or economic cause. Notably, land grabs were often framed as *either* political *or* economic in character, depending on the context of the land seizure and the players involved. However, a significant number of candidates failed to clearly differentiate between internal displacement and *voluntary* migration. A common error was the discussion of rural-to-urban migration by job seekers, which did not attract substantial credit unless candidates explicitly emphasised the *involuntary* nature of the movement. Stronger responses tended to identify severe poverty or crop failures as push factors driving *forced* migration, for example. Answers in Band 3 typically demonstrated a secure understanding of the concept of internal displacement, with relevant examples such as conflict and land grabs executed by powerful groups.

Many Band 2 responses relied heavily on the example of Ukraine without offering analysis beyond the information provided in the resource for Question 5a. Higher-level responses, particularly in the top band, featured more detailed and contextualised examples, such as those drawn from Somalia or the Democratic Republic of Congo.

- Q.6** **(a)** **(i)** Very few candidates answered this incorrectly.
- (ii)** Candidates were invited to analyse the map in a manner that would demonstrate key geographical skills. Responses achieving Band 2 marks successfully met this expectation, often employing various forms of data manipulation to enhance their analysis. These included the use of compass directions to interpret routes accurately, particularly identifying travel patterns towards the northwest and northeast. Some candidates also estimated likely travel speeds based on the information provided, showing a deeper level of interpretation. In contrast, Band 1 responses tended to rely on simply listing data from the resource, often noting the number of people embarking at each location and occasionally highlighting maximum and minimum values without further analysis. Centres preparing future cohorts for this examination may find this question useful in illustrating how geographical analysis extends beyond listing data points to include interpretation of spatial data and flow information.
- (iii)** Many candidates provided well-developed responses, demonstrating a thorough knowledge and understanding of the United Kingdom's historical and contemporary role in global systems, and some its enduring international relationships and interdependencies. Many candidates made explicit reference to the legacy of the British Empire and the enduring connections it has established between the UK and various regions worldwide. Additionally, some candidates critically addressed the negative legacies of colonialism that continue to impact the UK today, along with ongoing disputes over contested territories under UK sovereignty, such as the Falkland Islands, which have previously resulted in conflict, notably with Argentina.

Q.7 This essay was by far the more popular choice among the two human geography questions. With a mean mark of 13, the question proved accessible, with the majority of candidates demonstrating a secure ability to apply their knowledge and understanding effectively and to formulate a conclusion. The sophistication of this conclusion was a key factor in distinguishing candidates who achieved marks in the highest band.

At the upper end of the mark range, candidates provided detailed and accurate explanations of the rules governing the free movement of people, including references to visa regulations and the European Union's freedom of movement provisions. Additionally, these responses outlined key regulations pertaining to ocean traffic. The strongest answers were wide-ranging with minimal errors. Their conclusions reflected an awareness of the complexity inherent in the issues, particularly regarding the context-specific nature of global flow, for instance, differentiating between the free movement of refugees and economic migrants.

In contrast, responses in Band 2 were more limited in both the breadth and depth of knowledge presented. These answers often relied predominantly on knowledge of free movement of workers within Europe and on the distinction between open oceans (global commons) and territorial waters. Furthermore, candidates at this level often made errors, frequently demonstrating confusion about the rules applicable to shipping within the 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

- Q.8** Approximately one in ten candidates opted to answer this optional question. At the upper end of the mark range, candidates presented detailed case studies of urban-based NGOs or organisations supporting refugees. These responses effectively contrasted such organisations with non-governmental groups focused on marine conservation, typically addressing issues such as plastic pollution or the protection of fragile oceanic environments. High-scoring answers demonstrated a sophisticated evaluation of the relative importance of NGOs, often incorporating thoughtful consideration of the role of government actors alongside non-governmental efforts.

Mid-level responses tended to be more descriptive, outlining the actions of NGOs but offering limited analysis of their relative significance. The lowest scoring answers were generalised and, in some cases, contained inaccuracies in the recall of case study details.

The formatting of this question was somewhat unusual when compared with past papers. A deliberate decision was made at the paper-setting stage to guide candidates more directly towards specific issues, to minimise category errors that can complicate consistent and reliable marking. This approach proved effective, with no instances of candidates writing extensively about case studies or organisations that were outside the intended scope of the question.

Section C: 21st Century Challenges

- Q.9** At the upper end of the range, many candidates achieved close to full marks by presenting well-paced, well-supported evaluations of the issues. These responses demonstrated strong understanding, effective use of data, and critical reflection. In contrast, some lower-scoring candidates either ran out of time or misunderstood the assessment objectives, often evident in limited reference to the figures provided. A small number of candidates struggled to integrate Figure 8 meaningfully into their discussions. For example, some discussed the concept of positive feedback without linking it back to an evaluation of the success of the management strategies illustrated in Figures 5, 6 and 7. The highest-scoring candidates demonstrated sophisticated understanding, recognising the growing challenge posed by positive feedback loops related to permafrost thawing and albedo changes. A few of the very best responses also acknowledged the paradox that efforts to protect peatland could, in some cases, lead to drying and degradation of these vital carbon stores.

Q.10 This was the less popular of the two questions, with approximately one in five students choosing it. The question focused on the changing identity and sustainability of places shown in the figures, ideally augmented by further examples drawn from prior learning. At the upper end of the mark range, candidates wrote confidently about the concept of place identity and the different strands of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental. Some outstanding answers explored nuanced ideas, such as how a drowned village might persist as a place memory in the minds of older generations, despite changes to the physical landscape. In contrast, lower-scoring responses often discussed sustainability but omitted any mention of identity, or treated the two concepts as interchangeable. This led to a narrower evaluation, often limited to how land use changes could contribute to environmental sustainability in a broad, planetary context, without fully engaging with the local and social dimensions of place identity.

Candidates who referenced all the resources, maintained a clear line of argument, and included supporting detail and appropriate terminology were generally able to achieve marks close to the mean of 20. However, without a more explicit engagement with both the understanding and interpretation of sustainability (and its relationship to place identity) it was unlikely that they would achieve higher marks.

GEOGRAPHY

GCE A level

Summer 2025

COMPONENT 3: CONTEMPORARY THEMES IN GEOGRAPHY

Overview of the Component

- Although the component places considerable demands on candidates, both in terms of its breadth of subject content, and the challenging nature of the essays set, the paper proved to be accessible to a majority of candidates.
- There were few rubric errors, but there were several misinterpretations of questions.
 - Question 3: misunderstanding 'functioning', a technical term describing how ecosystems work.
 - Question 6/8: failure to write about sustainable urban strategies.
 - Question 13: failure to assess the sustainability of alternative sources of energy. A small minority confused alternative energy sources with unconventional sources of energy.
- Timing of questions continues to improve with only a small number of candidates not attempting all the questions in the time allocated, although some coherence was lost in the battle to finish. Many centres had clearly advised their candidates to attempt the lower tariff hazard questions (Section A) as the last question with fewer candidates writing over-long Section A answers.
- The paper differentiated very effectively with substantial numbers of candidates displaying both impressive levels of knowledge and conceptual understanding (AO1) to form an effective platform from which to develop their sophisticated skilled analysis, evaluation and synthesis (AO2).
- This year several examiners again commented on the candidate's sound essay writing skills with most essays having an introduction, a paragraphed main body which maintained a sound structure and a summative conclusion with evidence of appropriate planning. However, in the summary, further refinements are recommended.
- There was increasing evidence of the use of worthwhile diagrams which were well drawn and annotated. They were particularly useful in the hazard questions 1 and 2 (e.g. PAR model, Degg's models of vulnerability, Park's Disaster Response Curve), Question 3, (Gersmehl's nutrient cycling diagrams), Question 4 (the spectrum of conservation strategies), Question 6 & 8 (the Rodgers' model of urban sustainability), Question 14 (features of an urban climate). The mark scheme shows where they could have been useful. Candidates are advised to develop simplified versions which are quick and easy to use under exam conditions.
- Unfortunately, there were very few quality maps drawn, for example, in Questions 5 and 7, for locating developments such as SEZ.
- An area of concern, as in previous years, was the tendency of many candidates to drift away from the key focus of the question, often including over-long case studies (Q1 and 2, Q4, Q9, 10, Q11, Q12, Q13) which were very descriptive and not well used. They added very little to the response.

- Case study selection continues to be an area for centres to develop. Many centres had heeded the advice in reports in previous years with many candidates moving away from the two case study format (HIC/LIC) or for and against the argument framed in the question, ideally targeting relevant, extended examples embedded in a structural framework to ensure a more analytical AO2. It was pleasing to see some updated, recent case studies, but they needed to be well used. Mr Trump features, for example, in his 'drill, baby drill' plans for Alaska.
- Whilst there is a need for classic case studies of mega disaster events, many centres are to be congratulated on the emphasis they have placed on candidates developing research skills of up-to-date case studies, for example, recent hazard events or political developments or changes in conceptual thinking, for example, about biodiversity management as this adds to the quality of their exam answers.
- In spite of concerns expressed in previous reports, a minority of candidates continue to write illegibly.
- It was pleasing to see an improvement in the geographical vocabulary, often using specialised concepts which support the synoptic element of this paper in a non-contrived way.

In conclusion, it is pleasing that many centres have studied the reports of previous examinations and taken advantage of exam board training and heeded the advice on the two stages of long-term preparation (a) researching and developing knowledge and understanding for the chosen options and (b) honing the candidates essay writing skills. This year it was the honing of essay writing skills which needed more emphasis as some were very disappointing in a number of ways:

- The essays failed to define terms in the context of the question, e.g. effective management (Q11), sustainable energy source (Q12).
- Some candidates stated the conclusion before they started to construct their arguments.
- Some candidates churned out a number of case studies in no particular order in the main text showing a lack of structured planning.
- Many had very weak, often brief conclusions, sometimes not related to the question, possibly as a result of bad timing.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Theme 1: Tectonic Hazards

Whilst many candidates showed increasing competence in answering these questions, some answers were disappointing for a number of reasons. However, overall there were very few answers which scored exceptionally low marks with many very competent answers.

- Some candidates still spend far too long on this section, writing very lengthy, descriptive responses, with much irrelevant case study detail which was not well focused and contributed little to the more heavily weighted AO2 analysis and evaluation.
- Whilst a decreasing percentage of candidates adopted a 'two case study approach', there were still some answers favouring two in depth case studies, one in a HIC and one in a LIC or, one to argue with the question and one to disagree. Whilst in-depth case studies can be rewarded as well as breadth, both question 1 and 2 required comments on tectonic activity as opposed to just earthquakes or just volcanoes and so a broader approach of targeted, extended exemplar examples (fact files) was almost always more successful. For both of these questions the case studies needed to be targeted.
- Frequently, candidates failed to extract the relevant, key features of their chosen case studies, for example, human factors for question 1 or time frame management for question 2.
- There were frequent case study inaccuracies, including the mixing up of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami with the 2011 Sendai (Tohoku) earthquake and subsequent tsunami in Japan. The first was especially useful in question 1 for demonstrating the impacts on such a variety of countries. The second demonstrated ways of short-term and long-term management and success level variety and why, thus emphasising yet again the need for 'tagging' the unique features of case studies when revising and then carefully selecting across a range of tectonic events to strengthen analysis and evaluation. In both questions there were answers restricted to either volcanoes or earthquakes which diminished the scope for evaluation
- There were other frequent inaccuracies including dates of occurrence, magnitude (MM or VEI) and precise locations. Note. Iceland's tectonic activity is uniquely at a hotspot (magmatic plume on a divergent plate boundary).
- A confident and accurate AO1 (knowledge and understanding) really supports high level application in the analysis and evaluation required for AO2.
- Both questions required the candidate to 'peel back' the layers of argument necessary to answer the question. This can be achieved by taking a brief moment to make a careful plan (see Figures 1 and 2) which focuses on all aspects of the question.
- Both questions had a substantial number of candidates choosing them with popularity often varying on a centre basis.

Question 1

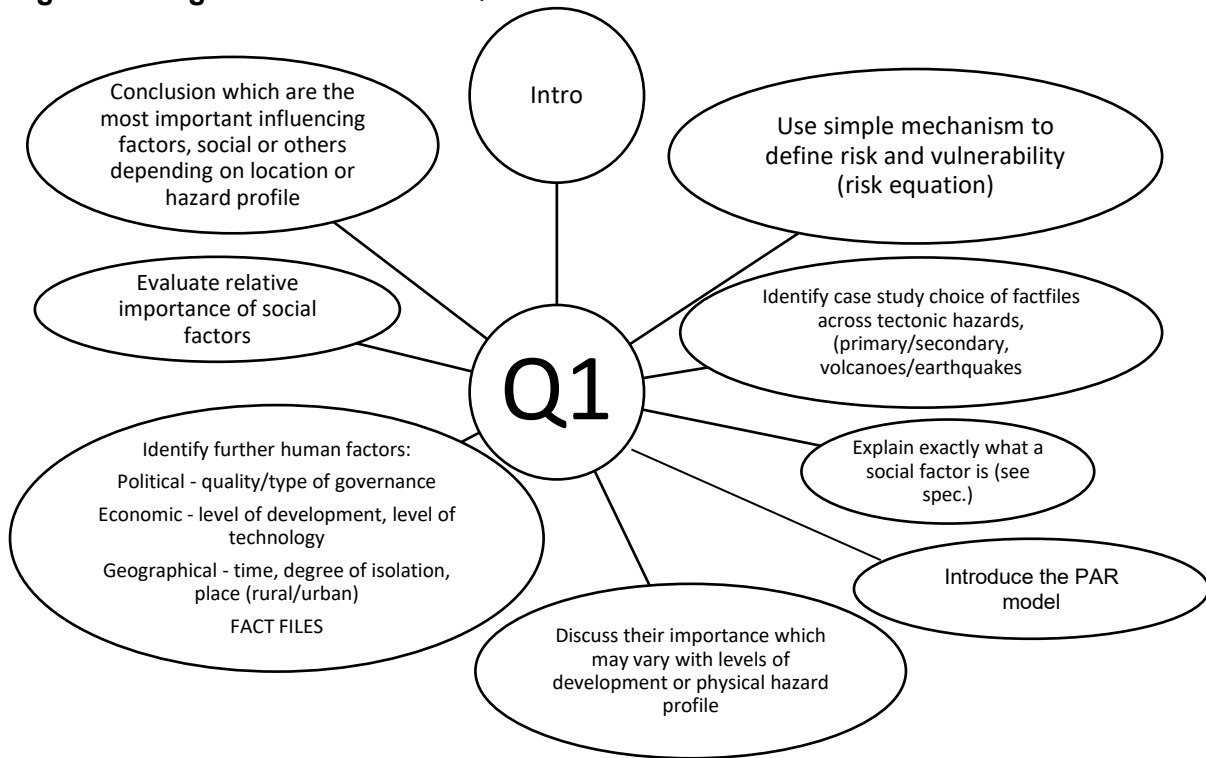
- The main barrier to achieving high marks in this question was firstly a misunderstanding as to what social factors are, and then secondly, a failure to identify the other human factors (all extrinsic factors).
- As can be seen from Figure 1, as listed in the specification, social factors include those to do with people: - population density, population structure/profile, and level of education. Other people related factors were of course acceptable, such as standards of health and even levels of poverty (which many included in economic factors).
- Other human factors in the specification included:
- Economic factors including the overarching one of level of development and level of technology.
- Political factors which largely included quality and type of governance
- Geographical factors which include rural/urban location, degree of isolation, time of day.

We did, obviously, accept other human factors such as cultural, e.g. worship of volcanoes.

TOP TIP: Always use the specification for defining terms before starting a section as many candidates were unsure of what constitutes social factors or what the other human factors could be.

- Again, as Figure 1 shows, these factors needed to be related to levels of risk and vulnerability. A basic version of the PAR model showing the root causes of disaster, the dynamic pressures and unsafe conditions was a useful starter. Many candidates also used the risk equation at this point to illustrate the ways risk and vulnerability contributed to a disaster.
- The next stage in the planning involved choice of case studies to provide evidence for the evaluation of relative importance of social factors compared to other human factors, and selecting the special features of each chosen case study which might support or reject the hypothesis posed by the question.

Figure 1: Diagrammatic Plan for Question 1

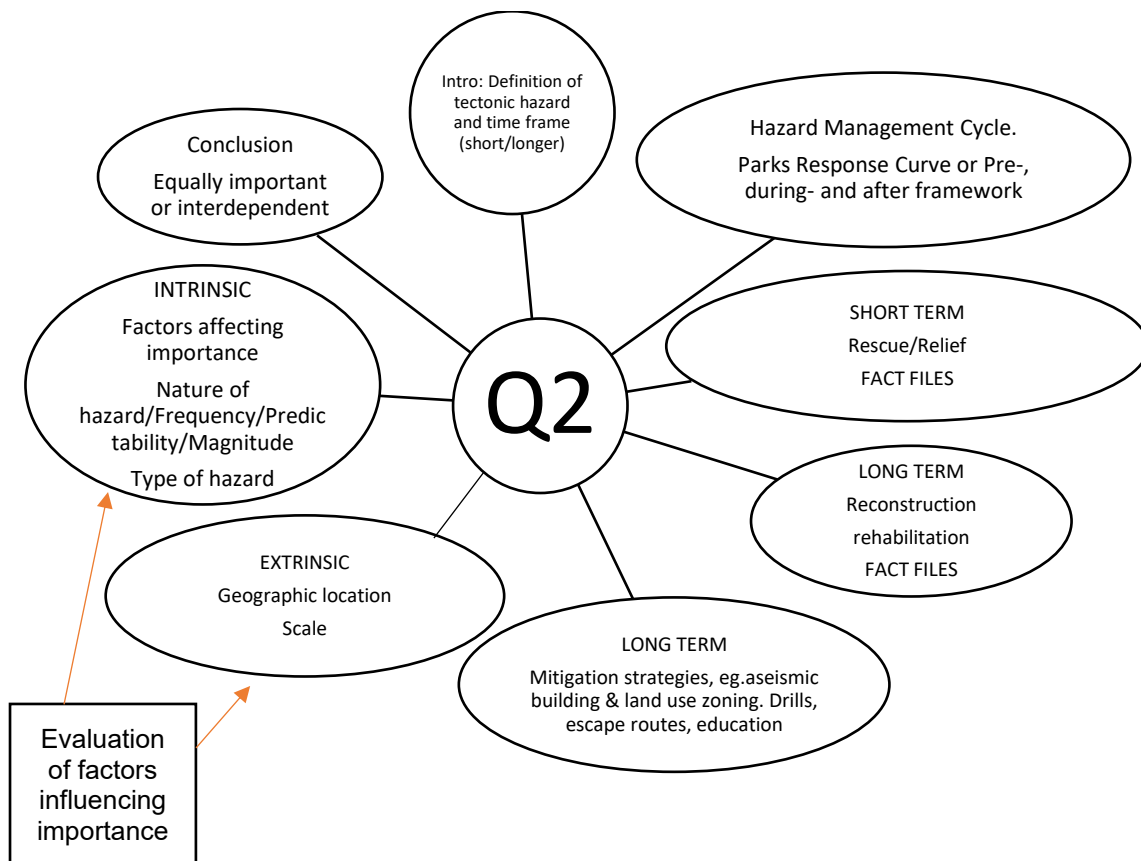


Case Study choice

- Teachers often ask, how many? Certainly two, especially two volcanoes, limits the scale and depth of the evaluation of the argument for and against.
- As time is very short at c.40 minutes writing time, no words must be wasted. For both these questions, the actual plate tectonic mechanisms were not required, especially if inaccurately learned.
- Date, location, death toll, damage amount all need to be accurately learned. Many answers are inaccurate, especially for the New Zealand (Canterbury) earthquake followed by Christchurch aftershocks. Better answers looked at a range of primary and secondary hazards from both earthquakes and volcanoes.
- In terms of structure, by hazard or by factors, both worked to a degree with the latter (factoral analysis) leading to the development of many cogent responses.
- Popular case studies which worked well included Haiti (2010), Nepal Gorka (2015), Turkey/Syria (2024), E15 (2011), Nevado del Ruiz, Mt St. Helens, Mt. Pinatubo as well as the Boxing Day tsunami (2004) and Tohoku/Sendai, Japan (2011).
- Some essays only selected social factors versus economic factors, and although most did attempt social, economic and political, geographical factors were rarely considered.
- The very best answers separated vulnerability from risk in their evaluations and conclusions and introduced ideas from physical geography such as the profile of a particular hazard in terms of magnitude, frequency and spread etc as a reason for why social factors or even the other factors were not the most important influence, especially for risk.

Question 2

Figure 2: Diagrammatic plan for Question 2



- Overall, there was a varied performance from candidates, with many answers quite sound, but not achieving the top marks.
- For this question it was essential that candidates established a time frame for what exactly constituted short- and longer-term responses. A simple diagram of either a Hazard Management Cycle or a Park's Disaster Response Curve Model (see mark scheme) could provide a framework for management – strategies pre, during, just after and longer term, ranging from hours to days to weeks or even years.
- Most candidates could distinguish between the very short-term relief involved, above all saving lives, to the longer-term rehabilitation taking place over the weeks following an earthquake to the reconstruction period involved in reestablishing livelihoods and restoring infrastructure.
- Many candidates missed out the longer-term strategies involved with preventing, predicting and monitoring hazard events which added more depth to the answer.
- A number of case studies contrasting issues with the various types of hazard from countries at different levels of development were used to support answers with Haiti earthquake, Tohoku tsunami and Nevado del Ruiz eruption being very successful.
- Where the answers struggled for the high grades was converting description to analysis and assessing what factors would impact on whether short or longer-term responses were more important for the effective management. There were many conclusions which after a series of descriptive and reasonably well learned case studies concluded that both responses were about equal.
- Better answers explored a number of concepts including interdependence and also identified a number of factors which could be significant.
- These concepts included the intrinsic nature of the hazard itself including whether it was possible to modify the event, modify the vulnerability. The magnitude, frequency, areal extent of a particular event are significant.
- Another key factor identified was the impact of extrinsic factors such as the geography of the event, the density, education and profile of the population as well as the economic factors including level of development and availability of technology, and political factors such as the quality of governance and availability of aid and insurance, all of which would have an impact on the decision as to which type of response was the most effective.
- Many better-quality answers observed that there were hindrances to LICs employing a full range of strategies as a result of economic factors and the lack of technology to install prediction and monitoring systems.
- So, the real issue here was the quality of AO2 analysis and evaluation.

TOP TIP: For Section A the AO1 marks are much less dominant than the AO2 marks (14 vs 20) so candidates need to be certain that their work contains detailed analysis and evaluation.

Section B: Theme 2: Ecosystems and Biodiversity

Although this theme remains a very popular option, there was, similar to previous years, a disparity in popularity and performance between the two questions set, often varying by centre.

Question 3

This question required a technical knowledge and understanding of the ecological processes which are core to the functioning of an ecosystem.

- Many candidates had little knowledge of the specification details and wrote in very general terms about the usefulness of ecosystems in providing goods and services with very little knowledge and understanding of either energy flows, primary productivity or nutrient cycling (the key processes and functions).
- The result was that many answers were of average quality or below, with a few outliers of excellent achievement complete with detailed diagrams, e.g. Gersmehl's nutrient cycles.
- Many candidates did not understand the demands of this question and resorted to a series of descriptive case studies of their favourite ecosystems, usually reef, rainforest and tundra. However, the question required an evaluation of the role of temperature as the most important influence on the functioning of ecosystems. Many candidates wrote in very descriptive terms how temperature influenced the distribution of their chosen ecosystem and associated the provision of goods and services with functioning or how temperature was posing problems for plants and animals in the tundra because of climatic warming.
- This question needed a knowledge and understanding of specifics, such as the role of limiting factors in primary productivity or the importance of rainfall as well as temperature in the nutrient cycling process in order to assess the importance of temperature.
- Very generalised human impacts not applied to functioning gained little credit.
- It was also legitimate for the purpose of analysis and evaluation to mention anthropogenic factors, both direct such as deforestation and impact of farming or indirect such as climate change, but in an answer which was evaluating the importance of temperature, in some cases the emphasis was over dominant.
- The successful responses considered the interlinkage of climate factors and often concluded that it was both the combination of temperature and precipitation which was the most important factor.

Question 4

- In many exam cycles, questions on biodiversity have generated some excellent answers. This year was true to an extent, but many candidates were just focused on 'churning out' a couple of their favourite case studies on reef, rainforest and tundra ecosystems with little regard for the frameworks for conservation. It was only by embedding a variety of conservation strategies and the reason for them that a high mark was possible. Equally, some candidates discussed a number of different types of conservation areas they were familiar with locally and again, if focused on the reasons for decisions, this too could be made to work really well.
- The specification 3.2.4 'Conserving Biodiversity' identifies the fundamental framework for the conservation spectrum (see diagram in the mark scheme) which can form the structure for a good answer.
- Issues such as what to conserve (in terms of habitats and species, how to conserve it (ex situ or in situ), management (top down or bottom up) design (SLOSS debate) or where to get funding from all formed the basis of an excellent AO1 section. The very best responses then went on to consider how and why conservation issues varied spatially (HIC/LIC contrast) and over time, for instance, discussions on the need to introduce sustainability as a key management concept and the impact of climate change.

Theme 3: Economic Growth and Challenge

This theme provides candidates with a choice of options from China, India or development in an African context. Questions are identical for India and China, but in 2025, because of specification requirements, were different for the African unit which is the most popular option.

India and China

Questions 5 and 7

These straightforward questions were overwhelmingly the most popular. However, standards of achievement showed a wide disparity with some exceptional answers and some at a very modest level of achievement:

- The first issue was that especially for India the role of government was misunderstood. Government in India refers to both the Federal Government and government of the individual states (different states have contrasting styles and the competence).
- Equally for both questions candidates could refer to both national and international government (e.g. agencies such as the UN – see specification).
- It was necessary to define economic activity. Using all sectors from primary to quaternary added breadth to the analysis.
- The question was about location, hence the need for a sound knowledge and understanding of the geography of India or China with, for example, mention of physical factors such as water/mineral resources, or geology or climate which were possibly key to understanding location, in addition to government locational decisions such as the siting of SEZ.
- The question was also about the development in particularly how certain key events were crucial to how economic activity changed over time.
- For India, most candidates did cite the 1991 major economic crisis of massive debt which forced the governing Congress party to borrow money from the IMF, provided the economy was opened up to economic globalisation to attract money from MNCs.
- For China this was the evolving government policy from the strict communism of Mao to the 1991 Open Door Policy of Deng through to the current Greater China policies of Xi.
- For both options, few candidates had knowledge and understanding of current strategies of Modi or Xi which would have enhanced their level of analysis.
- Good answers therefore in their evaluation distinguished between the role of government in location and in development.
- A further issue was defining economic activity and its various sectors with a minority looking at the primary sector or the quaternary sector in India or China with their very successful science/technology industries or their evolving green strategies (renewable energy, EV, batteries, chips etc)
- In China many successful answers discussed the uneven distribution between west and east China with good maps showing the Hu Line, but they failed to mention the Government strategies used to balance inequalities in the present-day economy such as the push westward along the Yangtse corridor or the Belt and Road Initiative (OBOR) initially focused along the former Silk Road.
- In these questions unlike in Question 10 (Africa) candidates had to evaluate the dominant role of government and most legitimately explored the importance of other factors which challenged the question of government dominance.

Questions 6 and 8

These two questions on how essential/important sustainable strategies were for the future of urban communities in India or China were unpopular and the level of achievement in all but a few cases was very disappointing for a number of reasons.

- Most candidates were to an extent aware of the growing and rapid urbanisation in both India and China as a result of growing opportunities in many urban areas which fuelled rural to urban migration. This has led to a whole raft of problems such as congestion, pollution, development of slum housing or poor-quality new housing in China reinforcing the need for sustainable strategies.
- The problem for many candidates was that although they knew what sustainable strategies were for food, water, energy etc. they have little knowledge or understanding of how to link these to urban communities. Indeed, the worst answers did not mention the word urban communities and diverted straight into the story of the Three Gorges Dam etc. Some enterprising students did 'plug the gap', for example, by writing about the South-North water transfer in China and then linking it to sustainable water strategies in Beijing etc.
- For good marks it was necessary to know about the theory and practice of sustainable urban cities (the Rodgers model of urban sustainability is a useful starter -see mark scheme). Looking at how environmental, social and economic sustainability strategies could be introduced at either a national or local level into named urban areas. Examples include Ecocities (India and China), Smart Cities (India and China), Sponge Cities (China) and Green Cities (China).
These details were necessary to achieve high AO1 marks and then convert the information into good quality reasoning in AO2.
- This proved a forgotten area of the specification with the result that the level of achievement was low and good answers rare.

Development in an African Context

Questions 9 and 10

In this very popular option, there was an encouraging performance but still with a considerable range of quality of response. Some centres had heeded the advice to ensure that candidates did take a broad overview of African development before launching into their chosen two or more countries. This greatly enhanced their performance in both questions 9 and 10. Of the two questions, Q10 was overwhelmingly the most popular and although there was a very varied level of performance the best answers to Q10 were excellent.

Question 9

In Question 9 many candidates were hindered by an uneven performance as they were either knowledgeable on the importance of free trade or fair trade, but rarely both.

- Most candidates understood how Free Trade worked and the better responses discussed the problem of free trade between African countries and Developed nations recognising its potential to develop as unfair trade leaving fledgling manufacturing industries in Africa unprotected. This contrasted with the recently developed trading blocs such as ECOWAS or AFCFTA for trade between African countries which had great potential to benefit the countries involved (similar to the EU or ASEAN). A minority of candidates produced excellent responses about tariffs, trading blocs and the special rules provided by the EU for LICs.
- Fewer candidates were confident with the concept of Fair Trade, but the best answers usually used a case study, for example, the cocoa growers of Ghana, to extol the benefits to the growers and were aware as consumers how it worked. The real problem came for AO2 in assessing the importance and whether the two were of equal importance to development.
- Successful answers evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of Free Trade in their chosen countries and explored the issue of the small scale and limited aerial coverage of Fair Trade in comparison.
- The question asked in conclusion was frequently, important for who? (governments, MNCs, African people?) which would have given structure to the AO2.

Question 10

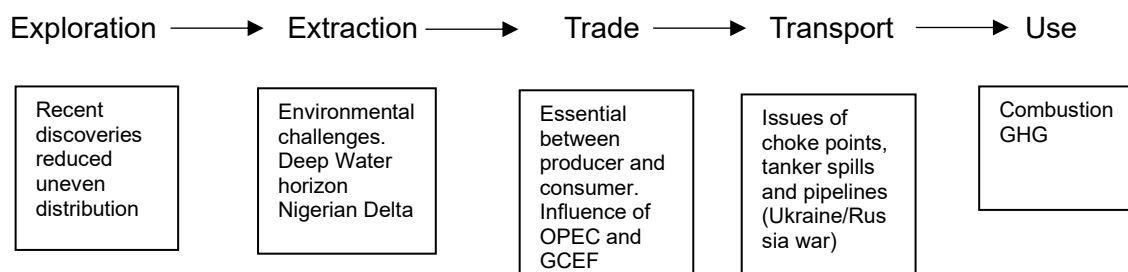
- There were very many sound answers showing a very confident knowledge and understanding of the role of political factors. They looked at how political factors such as the type/quality of governance, conflict, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Corruption and the role of global organisations such as the UN could either hinder or promote development to give a balanced answer.
- A significant minority of the candidates misinterpreted the question and explained the importance of political factors compared to other factors, such as physical factors, social or economic factors, thus drifting away from the question.
- High ability candidates were however able to link some of the constraining factors such as poor management of the resource lease (e.g. oil in Nigeria) to government actions. However, a drift into how physical and climatic factors influenced the flower industry of Kenya was not part of this question!
- Centres are to be congratulated on some excellent case studies of South Sudan, Sierra Leone or D.R. Congo for hindrance and some equally positive studies of how political factors helped development in Rwanda, Botswana, Kenya or Ethiopia (a warning to keep studies up to date as these last two have become less positive in recent years).

Theme 4: Energy Challenges and Dilemmas

There was a wide range of achievement in this extremely popular option with overwhelming numbers of students attempting Question 12.

Question 11

- Question 11 has been set in a similar guise in past papers. It is a difficult area of the specification and candidates who did best in this question were those who ‘unpicked’ the question further before they started writing. The key idea was to work out how the uneven distribution was a challenge and at what stage in the supply chain (see below) and also what other challenges there were to compare with.
- These included: - the inherently finite nature of oil (concept of peak oil 2050), - the ‘dash for gas’ which put pressure on supplies, - other ‘wicked’ problems of climate change and the impact this might make on demand, - issues relating to prices and quotas (role of OPEC), - impact on producers and consumers, - problems of exploitation (drilling) and transport (pipelines, choke points and collisions) and -geopolitics associated with the distribution (political issues in the Ukraine war etc).
- A useful introduction was one in which students clarified the terms and parameters and summarised the uneven distribution of oil (strategic ellipse centred on the volatile Middle East) and, in spite of a Russian concentration, the new widespread availability of gas.
- An interesting option adopted by some high-quality candidates was to break down the effective organisation into a supply chain network assessing the various stages with supporting exemplification.



- In such a complex question it is perhaps best to carry out ongoing evaluation and not leave it all for the conclusion.
- Note, the issues with oil and gas are different (different distribution and level of emissions) and this again could be used as a framework. The question was not about coal and for a minority there was a drift towards this resource.

Question 12

- This question was a popular question, but a minority of candidates either completely misunderstood the term 'alternative energy resources' and wrote entirely about unconventional sources or drifted into fracking, oil shales, tar sands and deep-water oil and even carbon capture.
- Most answers were of a good, but not exceptional, standard.
- A useful introduction defined the sources, recyclable, renewable, or critical and non-critical, and then made a selection from the following – HEP, tidal, wave, wind, solar, geothermal, biomass and nuclear.
- Whilst both breadth and depth are rewarded, when assessing the degree of sustainability of alternative sources, a variety of choice generated a much higher quality of analysis and evaluation. HEP, wind, solar and nuclear, or wind, solar, geothermal and biomass both provided a good contrast.
- A further mistake was not to define sustainability in the introduction. This led to many somewhat disjointed and disorganised answers. There were many answers which adopted a wide definition of sustainability, to include environmental, social and economic, which gave a huge amount of scope for discussion, for example, about nuclear waste and safety concerns.
- Some high-quality answers even looked at their chosen sources using a development dimension - from micro-hydro to mega dams (Three Gorges and GERD) or from solar cookers in parts of Africa to huge solar arrays such as Bhadla solar park in India, all of which added a dimension of scale and level of development to the answer.
- Extended examples worked well here and in spite of some commonly occurring favourites (Three Gorges Dam, Hinkley Point C, Geothermal in Iceland and Hornsea Wind Arrays were top favourites) there were many other useful examples.
- There were inaccuracies, such as wave and tidal developments which have been abandoned, but overall case study knowledge and understanding was to be commended.
- There were misconceptions about discontinuity of wind and the availability of solar although many candidates did know about the optimum conditions, for example, wind speed from 7-55 miles per hour (UK) or length of day, intensity of sunshine.

Theme 5: Weather and Climate

This theme is growing in popularity with candidates overall developing a more secure knowledge and understanding of the science behind weather and climate. Both questions had plentiful 'take-up'.

Question 13

- In spite of setting a similar question on hazards associated with high pressure systems in a recent cycle, a small minority of candidates did include both low- and high-pressure systems.
- A similar issue that arose with high pressure systems was an over-concentration on one type of system, for example, tropical cyclones, which narrowed the strength and depth of analysis and evaluation.
- It is vital (see Figure 9 in the mark scheme) that the introduction refers to the full range rather than the candidate launching into descriptions of a couple of tropical systems, e.g. Hurricane Katrina and Typhoon Nargis.
- Most of the case studies were well learned and generally accurate often with a mix of tropical cyclones and temperate named storms.
- The shortfall was in the evaluation of increasingly difficult to manage which hinged around the impact of short-term climate change leading to increasing intensity (magnitude) and areal extent and possible frequency set against a background of ability to predict, warn and protect and manage the various weather events. Many candidates used very sound frameworks which they had learned for their tectonic hazards work with excellent results.
- One useful factor, very rarely explained, was the developing international communications, for example, within Europe for prediction and warnings of named Atlantic storms.
- Overall, there were some excellent answers, often looking at improvements in management over time, for example, in the Bay of Bengal cyclones, or variations spatially depending on levels of development of the affected countries.

Question 14

- Although many candidates were familiar with some features of the local climate of urban areas and achieved reasonable levels at AO1, many answers were quite limited in scope with the choice of climate variables, usually mentioning temperature and wind, but few others such as precipitation or visibility (see mark scheme). Most answers concentrated almost exclusively on Urban Heat Islands.
- Candidates were less secure in looking at the underlying causal factors such as atmospheric composition, energy budget or nature of urban surfaces (height, roughness and composition). Many candidates drifted into a general discussion on pollution.
- The main issue was a disappointing performance in AO2, as many answers were short on information which could explain whether all urban areas created a distinctive local climate to a lesser or greater extent.
- In addition to size and shape of the urban area, other factors such as the location, e.g. coastal, level of development, seasonality or even small-scale variations caused by vertical heights of buildings, economic activity or distribution of lakes and green spaces could all have an impact.
- This impact could change over time as a result of management policies such as Clean Air Acts, ULEZ etc.
- The reasons were sometimes known but needed to be supported with detailed exemplification, for example, of variations in temperature between UHIs. Overall, the answers were sound but rarely achieved the necessary detail for top band marks.

Summary of key points

Specification Use

- Always check that candidates work very closely with the specification, for instance, knowledge of it was vital when identifying what a factor included, e.g. social factor (Q1) or political factor (Q10) or alternative energy source (Q10). Always check coverage in the run up to exams to fill any gaps – for instance, Q6/8 sustainability in urban communities or Q3 functioning of ecosystems were not widely known.

Introductions

- Introductions need a lot of work. So many candidates failed to define terms or sketch out the scope of their answers in their plans. In Q12, a very popular question, it was vital that sustainability was defined as a framework for the question. Many even make a conclusion in the introduction before analysing the issues and then coming to a reasoned judgement.
- A very useful exercise is to practise dissecting past exam questions to identify key words and what exactly should be included in a planned outline (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Drift from the question was an extremely common feature and needs to be managed as it is not only consuming valuable exam time but also is not relevant to achieve credit.

Case Studies

- Firstly, update case studies, e.g. latest hazards or economic developments in India, China or Africa. A number of student orientated publications help here including Geography Review, Geo File and Geo Factsheets.
- Secondly, develop summary fact files of the profile of the hazard itself and its special features (Tohoku 2011, MM9.1, triple whammy – earthquake, tsunami, Fukushima nuclear disaster, number of deaths, amount of damage, management issues). These fact files can be directed at the precise wording of the question. For instance, in Q1 and Q2 this year, details of which plates and type of movement were not needed, but discussion of short- and long-term responses or the key factors influencing the scale of the impacts were.

Diagrams

- Use the past and present mark schemes to draw diagrams, e.g. simplified versions. Park and Degg were widely known for Q1 and Q2, but sustainable urban systems diagrams for Q6 and Q8 were not. Equally Gersmehl nutrient cycle diagrams were rare. The situation is certainly improving, but there is more work to do and while a Kuznets Curve (commonly used) can be useful, it had limited relevance for the questions set this year.

Maps

- Maps were a rarity and usually not well drawn. One very good use was in the India and China section (Q5 and Q7) where a diagrammatic map could be drawn to show all areas mentioned, e.g. Delhi or Beijing or SEZ. Some students used a diagrammatic map of China which showed the Hu line which demonstrated the current development and population inequality between west and east China and reinforced their comments on both location and development of economic activity.

Legibility

- Lastly, still a major issue while exams are handwritten and red pen marked. It is vital that, unless candidates seek special consideration to use word processing software, that they practise developing readable writing under timed conditions during their course under time constrained conditions.

GEOGRAPHY

GCE A level

Summer 2025

COMPONENT 4: INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

Overview of the Component

Administration

Centres are congratulated for their administration when marking and submitting the NEA. Administration requires:

- sufficient annotation to justify the marks that have been given
- submission of the completed proposal forms
- submission of declaration forms signed by teachers and candidates.

The vast majority of centres completed these tasks perfectly. In a minority of cases, moderation was hindered by insufficient annotation or delayed by the absence of the correct forms. Centres are reminded that the candidate declaration form was amended in 2023 to include a reference to the use of Artificial Intelligence. Where old forms were submitted, the moderation process was delayed while the new form was requested. It should be noted that moderation cannot take place unless this form, duly signed, has been received by the moderator for every candidate in the sample. To save any confusion it is important to record the correct candidate number on the NEA, proposal form and mark recording sheets. In future cycles, candidate work will be submitted electronically. When doing this, it is essential to ensure that the candidate numbers are recorded within the scanned/electronic documents and that these match the candidate number recorded in the file name.

Proposal forms

Moderators saw a wide range of titles spanning across physical and human geography themes. Many titles were well considered and naturally lead to a logical sequence of enquiry. However, the moderators still see examples of titles that are ill considered. This is often because:

- the scale or scope of the title is too ambitious, rendering the investigation unachievable
- the title is poorly linked to the specification
- the candidate has developed research questions or hypotheses that, when taken as a whole, do not naturally suggest an enquiry approach that will resolve the issue raised in the title.

These issues suggest that better use could be being made of the proposal form during the planning phase of the investigation. Centres are encouraged to challenge candidates to closely consider:

- how the investigation links explicitly to one key idea in the specification
- whether the two or three suggested research questions (or hypotheses) link effectively to each other in order to resolve the overall title
- whether the suggested data collection methods will generate sufficient data to give the candidate a range of options when selecting data presentation and data analysis methods.

Please encourage candidates to link their proposed title to a specific key idea in the specification. A link to 'place' or 'ecosystems' is not sufficient. At the same time, candidates should be dissuaded from attempting to link their titles to three or four different key ideas. Investigations that take this scattergun approach create issues for the candidate as the investigation lacks focus. Furthermore, it is difficult to credit such investigations as having a 'well defined research question' in the context section of the mark scheme. The most successful proposals are those where the candidates identify a single bullet point of content in the specification. This allows them to develop a coherent line of enquiry around a central theory, concept or process.

Centres are reminded that, for those wanting another point of view, the board offers advice on NEA proposals. The title advice service is designed for new or inexperienced teachers who are not familiar with the NEA process. Alternatively, it can be used to provide guidance to candidates who suggest investigations that are problematic because they are only tenuously connected to the specification or because they are too vague or too large in scope to be achievable.

The quality of the work seen this year was similar to that seen in 2024 with a small increase seen in the mean mark in 2025.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Context

The context is tackled by most candidates with a degree of confidence. Many investigations sampled in 2025 were based on a research question or hypothesis that defined a suitable investigation at an appropriate scale. Those that were less well defined tended to be over ambitious or lacking in focus. The least successful investigations were those that had too many disparate research questions and, as such, the questions failed to provide a holistic route through the enquiry.

Reports should provide a concise locational and/or theoretical context to the investigation which is supported by a discussion of geographical literature. The most successful reports base this discussion on two, three or four relevant articles, books or websites – no more.

The main findings of this literature are summarised and linked effectively to the candidates' own investigation. In this way, candidates are able to explain current thinking behind the geography that underpins their investigation. Some candidates also use the literature to justify their enquiry.

On the other hand, the use of literature in the context is still problematic for some candidates. The context can be less successful when:

- candidates copy and paste passages from their literature research without adding any explanation and without making any explicit links to their proposed enquiry
- the 'literature' used is something akin to a revision website and there is a failure to show any progression in theoretical understanding from GCSE - this often seems to be the case in coastal investigations
- a 'review' of the literature is given in the sense of a five-star rating rather than a discussion of its relevance to the investigation.

It is accepted that a lot of geographical theory dates to the twentieth century. This does not necessarily make it irrelevant to present day investigations. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*, was first published in 1977, but its discussion of perception of space and place remain largely valid today. Candidates wanting to investigate space and place would be well advised to do some literature research into theories of perception. However, candidates should be firmly steered away from basing a place study on the Burgess' model. This model was developed in the 1920s to explain urban patterns created by mass migration into US cities.

Applying this model to UK cities is not useful in explaining current patterns or processes of counter-urbanisation or re-urbanisation.

The majority of coastal investigations focus on either sand dune ecosystems or beach profiles and/or the management of beaches. The most successful sand dune investigations explain aeolian processes and theories of zonation and the role of vegetation in dune development. However, many beach profile/beach management projects fail to move beyond a GCSE-level discussion of longshore (littoral) drift. Attempts to explain cyclical beach profiles are simplistic and often confused. Discussion of theories such as littoral cells, sediment budgets, systems theory, equilibrium or feedback mechanisms (which would be appropriate at this level) are rare, but very welcome when seen.

The majority of candidates provide a confident risk assessment that is clearly well-considered and specific to the place that is being investigated. In projects that have a successful context, the ethical consideration is also specific to the method of investigation. By contrast, the less successful projects tend to provide very generic comments concerning the ethics of geographical investigations. This is something that could easily be addressed by future cohorts.

Methods of field investigation

This section of the report is differentiated by the marking criteria that describe the sampling strategy. The majority of candidates do a good job of describing data collection methods, but the depth and accuracy of the discussion of sampling strategies varies considerably.

The most successful projects find the correct balance when describing the methods of data collection:

- the methods are described in sufficient detail to be replicable by the reader.
- at the same time, the tone of the report assumes that the reader is informed. There is no need to describe a clinometer or give a generic description of how it is used. However, the reader wants to know specific details – where were sample readings taken? How often? How far apart? Why were these decisions taken?
- the methods that have been used are valid. It is clear to the reader that suitable methods have been selected that will generate sufficient data to answer the research question.
- there is clear evidence that 'individual approaches' have been taken. For example, questionnaires or environmental quality surveys have been created or adapted to suit the research question, rather than the use of an off-the-shelf form.

Sampling strategies are less well-considered by many candidates. At a basic level, sampling strategies are simply named without further discussion. To be given a mark in band 5, the 'sampling strategy is well designed, explained and justified. The strategy is wholly appropriate to the investigation'. This means that a full discussion of the strategy is needed at this level that includes:

- sufficient detail to replicate the strategy. For example, how was random sampling achieved? Successful projects describe the creation of a grid, for example, and the use of random numbers to identify sample points across space.
- discussion of sample size and the geolocation of sample sites.
- consideration of timing and frequency. Was data collected once or more than once? If more than once, how often and why?
- justification for the decisions that were made. This might include, for example, why the sample sites were selected, or why random sampling was used rather than systematic.

Stratified sampling is poorly understood by the majority of candidates. Many state that they have used this strategy when they have, in fact, used purposive sampling. Stratified sampling is a probability sampling technique. It should only be used when the population can be divided into discrete subgroups or strata, for example, demographic age groups. After the strata have been identified, and the proportions calculated, random or systematic sampling then needs to be used to sample a relevant percentage from each of the strata.

Most candidates who claim to have used stratified sampling have identified that their total population has different features and they make sure that some of the sample is selected to represent each of these features. For example, they might identify that their area of investigation includes three different housing estates, and they make sure that part of the sample comes from each estate. This method of sampling is a non-probability sampling technique and is commonly known as purposive sampling. It is used where the sample is selected based on specific characteristics that the researcher believes are most relevant to the study's objectives.

This section is structured by some candidates using a table whereas others use extended writing. WJEC has no preferred or recommended way to structure this section. However, candidates should be aware of the potential limitations of using a table as there is a tendency to:

- provide very concise descriptions so that the reader would find it difficult to replicate the method.
- copy and paste blocks of text from part of a table to another – making it difficult to see how 'individual' approaches are taken.
- sampling strategies are rarely discussed in sufficient detail within a methodology table. This issue is much less apparent when candidates use extended writing.

Data presentation of findings

The quality of data presentation varies considerably across centres. Data presentation is an area of strength within the NEA for some centres. However, for other centres, the selection, variety and accuracy of data presentation is relatively limited. The relevance of the sampling strategy is clear here – candidates need to think ahead when planning their sampling strategy to ensure that they have enough of the right sort of data to be able to draw a range of graphs. Furthermore, unless candidates collect geolocated data, they will find it impossible to present data that shows spatial patterns.

The Band 5 marking criteria describes ‘wide ranging and accurate use of appropriate ... techniques’ and that these techniques are ‘well-selected, applied and wholly appropriate’.

This means that successful candidates:

- use a wide range of data presentation techniques – from simple dot maps and bar graphs to complex maps with layered data or located proportional symbols.
- select methods that are appropriate to show the patterns and trends in the data. At a simple level this means selecting bar charts for discrete data and line graphs for continuous data – something that some candidates unfortunately still get wrong. For the most successful candidates, this means selecting the technique that shows the trends or patterns in the data most effectively. For example, a candidate who has conducted traffic or footfall surveys at ten locations could present this as a bar chart. Alternatively, they could locate the bars on a map or draw an isoline map – which would be more appropriate because these techniques show spatial patterns. However, if they have also recorded direction of movement, they could select a map that uses proportional arrows – which would be more sophisticated because it would allow an analysis of spatial patterns or movement.
- complete each method of data presentation accurately. This means that graphs need to have axes that are labelled and that units of measurement are included. Maps need to have scale lines and north arrows. If proportional symbols have been added, these need to have a key and a scale. It is surprising how often these elements are missing, especially where a candidate has used a computer programme to create a map or graph.

One misconception noted by moderators among a small number of centres is that cartographical techniques that have been copied and pasted from secondary sources can be credited within the data presentation section – they cannot. It may be relevant for a candidate to copy and paste a map from another source. If they do so they must:

- clearly state the source of this extract. Note that the accurate referencing of secondary sources, including any such map extract, may be credited in the conclusion and presentation requirements of the mark scheme.
- interpret the patterns that are shown on the map as they relate to the aims of their investigation. If this interpretation is done well, it may be credited in the analysis and interpretation section of the mark scheme.

Analysis and interpretation of findings

This section of the report requires candidates to identify and interpret patterns, trends and correlations in the data. The marking criteria make it clear that there are two elements to consider:

- analysis – the identification of patterns, trends and correlations. There are a number of methods of analysis can be used to bring clarity to the evidence seen in both quantitative and qualitative data. Some of these are explored below.
- interpretation – how the evidence can be explained. This step requires the candidate to apply their wider geographical understanding to the specific data collected in their enquiry in order to explain it. Those candidates operating in the upper two bands use the interpretation to link their analysis to their research aims. In the best cases, candidates use their understanding of their literature research to offer explanations about the evidence that they can see in their own project.

For the less successful candidates, operating in the lower bands, analysis will mean describing the evidence using extended writing. For more successful candidates, operating in Bands 3, 4 or 5, this stage of the investigation will mean selecting appropriate method(s) of analysis that allow them to systematically and accurately describe patterns, trends and correlations. For the analysis of quantitative data this may mean calculating means, modes, standard deviation or IQR to summarise the key evidence seen in quantitative data.

Investigations of coastal processes could use Zingg analysis – a relatively easy but very effective technique that is rarely seen in NEAs. Some candidates who investigate patterns over space/place use Nearest Neighbour analysis very effectively – although, again, this is seldom seen. For qualitative data, analysis may mean the coding of an interview or the use of annotation to identify significant features of an image. It should be noted that annotation requires two steps to be effective:

- a tie line to identify the significant feature(s) of the image
- a concise interpretation of that feature.

The use of extended writing beneath an image which fails to identify the significant feature(s) is not as effective as annotation – and the use of the bands in the marking criteria should reflect this.

Quantitative analysis may also mean applying an appropriate statistical test such as Spearman's Rank, Chi Square or Mann Whitney. Candidates probably need greater confidence in their numeracy before they begin the NEA so that they know which methods are valid with which data. Examples were seen where there was insufficient data to conduct a test. Spearman's Rank needs at least ten pairs of data to make the test valid. Knowing this, a candidate can justify that they need at least 10 sample points on their transect when they are discussing the sampling framework.

Where statistical tests were used, evidential steps in the process were often missed by a significant number of candidates. For example, tests were started without stating a hypothesis or null hypothesis. Frequently, the result of a test was stated, without presenting the data or providing any evidence of calculation. Some candidates relegated their statistical tests to an appendix. Please encourage candidates to put this important evidence in the main body of the report.

Conclusions and presentation requirements

The conclusions are often tackled successfully by candidates. A successful response will:

- select key evidence to substantiate the conclusions
- provide a concise summary for each research question
- provide an overall conclusion to the investigation
- relate their findings to wider geographical theory – in the best cases, the candidates refer back to key literature used in the introduction.

Having said that, many candidates still present a conclusion to each sub-question without reaching a final overall conclusion. Furthermore, as noted in the 2024 Principal Moderator's report, the majority of candidates reach very firm conclusions – this would seem to be undermined by the evaluation that follows where a candidate finds a number of limitations in the accuracy or validity of the investigation. Some candidates write an evaluation before the conclusion. This may help the candidate come to a more pragmatic overall conclusion. It would be nice to see candidates using qualitative expressions such as 'tentative' or 'partial' when coming to conclusions.

The majority of candidates produce reports that are presented very well – they are almost always well-structured and usually logical. However, generous marking is sometimes seen by moderators in respect to the presentation requirements:

- a significant number of reports do not have accurate references – but are still given marks in the upper bands.
- an even greater number of reports are not concise – but are still given marks in the upper bands.

Candidates should provide a reference every time they refer to a piece of geographical literature (for example, in the introduction, analysis or conclusion section) and whenever they lift a secondary source (such as a map or graph in the data presentation or analysis section) and paste it into their report. The source of the latter is often missed by candidates.

In order to reduce the word count, and improve conciseness, the following advice is offered:

- Use the proposal form to steer candidates away from a title that compares two places. They are doubling the workload – and risk confirmation bias.
- Advise candidates to structure a word count for each section of the report that adds up to no more than 4,000 words – and do this before they begin to write.
- Advise candidates to use, on average, no more than three pieces of literature to support the discussion of theory in the introduction. Keep the literature review down to 300 words. It should not be presented as an essay in its own right. It should be focussed on the theory that is being tested and relate directly to the investigation.
- Suggest that candidates have two or three research questions (rather than more) and use these to structure the analysis and conclusions sections.
- Advise candidates to focus on discussing and justifying the sampling rather than describing too much detail of data collection methods.
- Arrange the analysis section around the research questions rather than around individual forms of data processing.

Evaluation

As has been pointed out in previous Principal Moderator reports, this section is worth 25% of the overall marks. Most candidates realise the importance of this section, and many write at great length. However, many fail to structure this section – with a result that this section often lacks conciseness or clarity. The majority of candidates focus on the limitations of the data collection methods rather than considering the overall effectiveness of the investigation.

A successful candidate will:

- evaluate the knowledge and understanding they have gained – discussing how their investigation has clarified their wider understanding of a geographical theory, concept or process.
- evaluate the validity and reliability of the investigation as a whole – moving away from a focus on methods to consider the validity of the research questions, and the reliability of the sampling strategies and methods of analysis, for example.
- evaluate whether the ethical dimension of the investigation was handled well – considering, for example, the problem of confirmation bias when selecting research question or when selecting particular methods of data presentation.
- reflect on realistic and worthwhile extensions to their investigation.
- consider relevant and realistic improvements to the investigation.

Less successful candidates focus on only one or two of the above points. An evaluation of the knowledge and understanding gained is often missed, as is an evaluation of the ethical dimension.

Marking of this section is still generous by some centres. The principle of level marking is that, if all criteria within one band are met then a mark at the top of that band can be given. If, on the other hand, some criteria are met in, for example, band 4, and others are met in band 3 or band 2, then a best fit decision has to be made. A mark in band 3 (or even at the bottom of band 4) might be appropriate, depending on the weight of evidence in the individual case, but a mark in the upper part of band 4 would not be appropriate in this case. It should be noted that the marking criteria has four bullet points in Bands 3, 4 and 5.

Candidates often focus all or most of their energy on one or two of these - usually an evaluation of the methods (part of the second bullet) and possible improvements (the fourth bullet). If, as is often the case, an evaluation of the knowledge gained (the first bullet), the ethical dimension (part of the second bullet) and reflections for further fieldwork (the third bullet) are completely absent or only partially considered, then the marker must take a best fit approach to deciding on a band.

Summary of key points

- Investigations must be geographical, and each should be clearly linked to one bullet point in the specification. This helps candidates identify the geographical theory that is being tested.
- Many investigations are far too wordy. The problem usually starts in the aims (too broad) and in the introduction – which often resembles an ‘everything I know about’ account of coastal processes or urban regeneration. Investigations need a clear focus.
- A thorough discussion of sampling strategies is more important than a description of ranging poles and quadrats.
- There are a wide range of methods that could be used to analyse quantitative and qualitative data – and these are under-utilised by many centres. These range from the most basic (e.g. mean, mode, median) to the more complex.
- Evaluations are good but tend to lack focus. Candidates should be reminded of the marking criteria.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 02922 404 281

Email: GCEGeography@eduqas.co.uk

Qualification webpage: <https://www.eduqas.co.uk/qualifications/geography-asa-level>

See other useful contacts here: [Useful Contacts | Eduqas](#)

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WJEC
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX
Tel No 029 2026 5000
Fax 029 2057 5994
E-mail: exams@wjec.co.uk
website: www.wjec.co.uk