GCSE Examiners' Report

Subject Geology

Level GCSE

Summer 2026

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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 unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and component level. 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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Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page.
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Executive Summary

The two components forming the GCSE Geology assessment in 2026 were both of similar formats to these components in previous years, and it is clear that many candidates were familiar with the typical demands of such papers.

The mean marks achieved by candidates were slightly lower in Component 1 and higher in Component 2 than in 2025

In both components candidates generally performed well on topics such as minerals, rocks and fossils. However, in Component 1 some candidates did not understand fully the evidence for unconformities. In Component 2 candidates had some difficulty stating and explaining field evidence for a lava flow and identifying fault types

In Component 2 there was a particular emphasis on the assessment of candidates' knowledge and understanding of practical skills and techniques, which accounted for 31 of the 80 marks. The drawing of the igneous rock in question 1 was quite often shown as a granular rock, although the sketching of the folds in question 4 was undertaken well in comparison with the equivalent drawing in the previous year. Most candidates did attempt the completion of the map although many found the variable displacement of beds quite challenging.

The answers involving mathematical skills were answered very well by many in both components, although some basic errors were made in measuring from scale bars and graphs.

Throughout both components candidates simply gave answers that were too brief for the number of marks available. Candidates should refer to the number of marks allocated to a question and account for this in the amount of detail that they incorporate in their answers.

As in previous years it was notable that candidates are using the names of rocks not on the specification, such as gabbro and dolerite. Teaching candidates these names puts them at a disadvantage in the examinations compared to those who are not aware of such terms and who therefore have fewer chances of getting the answer wrong.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Writing answers that respond to all the key information given in the stem of the question	Online exam review	Annotated samples of candidate responses which can be used to show good practice.
Recall of a variety of topic areas	GCSE KNOWLEDGE ORGANISERS	A collection of knowledge organisers to support the learning of GCSE Geology.

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Component 1: Geological Principles

Overview of the Component

Component 1 covered the specification aspects of mineralogy and mineral prospecting; the change in latitude of the UK through time as evidenced by sedimentological and fossil evidence; the fossil record of life on Earth; planetary geology; divergent plate boundary models, igneous activity and structure; and factors affecting the accumulation of oil and gas. Component 1 also assessed appropriate practical and mathematical skills.

Component 1 was accessible to the majority of candidates and on balance there was little evidence to suggest that candidates ran out of time. A very small number of candidates failed to make use of the data sheet as instructed and sacrificed a few easily obtainable marks.

The QER extended response questions worth 6 marks produced a wide range of responses with candidates scoring across the full range of marks. Virtually all candidates attempted these questions this year.

The mathematically based questions produced a variety of responses yet demonstrated that candidates could transfer skills learned from GCSE Mathematics.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Question 1: Mineralogy and mineral prospecting.

This proved to be a good initial question enabling most candidates to make a successful inroad into the paper, with the multiple-choice questions being generally answered well by many of the candidates. In the question asking how halite and galena can be distinguished, the data sheet was used well, and candidates were able to describe the test results enabling this distinction. Some candidates failed to describe fully the differing test results for both minerals. In the volume calculation candidates proved adept at rearranging the equation and substituting the values for density and mass. The choice of 2 or 3 significant figures for the final answer, given that the data was to 2 significant figures, was a good differentiator. Most candidates were able to partially evaluate the student's response regarding the inferences that were possible to make from the geochemical anomaly map for lead. More specifically candidates recognised that the possible orientation of a fault would be N-S rather than E-W, however few candidates then successfully evaluated the remaining aspects of the student's statement, namely if the deposits were economic or formed along a fault.

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Question 2: The change in latitude of the UK through time.

The data sheet was well used to assess the timing of movement of the UK for part (a) of the question, however many candidates did not continue to use the data sheet to explain the evidence for unconformity A in part (b), where the realisation of a major time gap (~250 Ma with the Mesozoic being missing) is integral to the identification of this boundary as an unconformity. For unconformity B, many candidates recognised the significance of the eroded/weathered junction between the Carboniferous and Permian beds but surprisingly neglected to comment on the angular nature of the unconformity. The 6-mark QER question proved to be a good discriminator with virtually all candidates gaining some marks. Most candidates were able to explain well how the sedimentary and/or fossil evidence was able to support changes in depositional environment or climate, but some did not then elaborate on how this information can be used to support the change in the latitude of the UK as the question asked.

Question 3: The fossil record of life on Earth.

The multiple-choice questions were generally answered well although a minority of candidates failed to tick two boxes on the multiple-choice question on hominid brain case volume. The question requiring the explanation of the depositional environment of the shale differentiated well as many candidates did not address all three aspects of the question to gain full marks, namely; low energy, sea floor, little oxygen. Most candidates answered the question on the analysis of the dinosaur trackway very well despite the significant amount of written precursory information needed to answer the question. A common error was to measure the stride length as 1.3m (i.e. half the actual answer) but these candidates benefitted from error carried forward in the remainder of the question. The majority of candidates showed good knowledge of inequalities to determine the type of movement of the dinosaur.

Question 4: Planetary geology.

The multiple-choice questions were generally once again answered well. Many candidates were able to describe the evidence for the highland areas of the Moon being older than the lowland areas in part (c), namely the higher concentration/density of impact craters but relatively few candidates went on to explain this evidence i.e. the longer time that the highlands were exposed to meteorite impacts. A few candidates erroneously used the laws of superposition and cross cutting relationships to explain this age difference. Generally, this second 6-mark QER question did not perform as well as the first one in question 2(c). However, this question still differentiated well with good responses discussing evidence from topographic features, craters and the age of rocks to explain the presence/absence of tectonic activity on the Earth/Moon. Candidates who did not access middle and upper band marks generally did not utilise the evidence presented on Figure 4c and restricted their answers to features of the Earth on Figure 4d.

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Question 5: Divergent plate boundaries: models, igneous activity and structure.

The standard of response to part (a)(ii) was very centre specific with some centres clearly having taught that partial melting of mantle rock produces basaltic magma and other centres not having done so. Part (b)(i) enabled most candidates to gain one mark, but extremely few candidates realised that the graph shows a reduction of the rate of increase of temperature with increasing depth and equated the increased gradient of the curve as suggesting the opposite. The term positive correlation was used erroneously by many candidates to describe the curve. The two calculations differentiated well with many candidates showing their adeptness at performing rate and gradient (slope) calculations. Incorrect read off of values from the map and graph were rewarded if the methodology of calculation was correct and valid. Part (d) proved difficult for a significant number of candidates and many of the responses were rather disappointing. Many candidates either compared or contrasted the two models rather than doing both, and they did not seem to understand the meaning of 'rocks that outcrop on the sea floor'.

Question 6: Factors affecting the accumulation of oil and gas.

The multiple-choice questions were once again answered well. Despite its simplicity part (a) differentiated well as some candidates did not describe the evidence in the photographs for the contrasting permeabilities of sandstone and shale and a few other candidates confused permeability and porosity. The final question, part (c), performed very well with most candidates identifying the problems in trapping mechanism and source rock/reservoir juxtaposition in location W and the perfect conditions regarding source rock/trap/reservoir rock/cap rock in location V.

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Component 2: Investigative Geology

Overview of the Component

The Component 2 paper included short and extended questions based on Map 1. The paper assessed a wide variety of topics with an emphasis on rock groups, minerals, geological structures, and engineering geology. It also required candidates to draw on their knowledge and understanding of practical skills and techniques, which accounted for 31 marks.

Candidates were assessed on the sketching of a folded outcrop, as well as the texture of a porphyritic andesite. Generally, the recording of dinosaur footprint data in both the tally table and the rose diagram was completed well. Many candidates attempted the incomplete map in Question 5; however, few achieved full marks as the direction and amount of displacement were not consistently plotted correctly. Only a small number of candidates were able to accurately plot the boundary between Rock Units B and C.

Mathematical skills were also assessed in the paper and accounted for 21 marks. In particular, the calculation of the size of the trilobite was generally completed well, with many candidates clearly showing their working. The calculation of the mean size of grains in the sandstone was also completed well.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Question 1:

Overall, this question was answered reasonably well, although there were some recurring misconceptions. In (a)(i), many candidates sketched grains rather than crystals and did not always use the scale bar effectively, resulting in inaccurate crystal sizes and proportions between phenocrysts and groundmass. In (a)(ii), some candidates misinterpreted the distribution of crystal sizes and incorrectly identified the texture as equicrystalline. In (a)(iii), higher-level responses correctly used the terms phenocryst and groundmass and linked their formation to differences in cooling rate and depth within the crust, while weaker responses tended to describe only one stage of formation. In (b), a pleasing number of candidates correctly identified andesite; however, a significant minority named rocks not included on the specification, such as gabbro or dolerite. Part (c) proved challenging for many candidates, with many candidates achieving very few marks. In (c)(i), most candidates recognised that fine crystals indicated an extrusive origin, though many did not fully support their answer with evidence from Table 1 and Map 1. In (c)(ii), only a small number of candidates gained credit by referring to features such as weathered surfaces or baked margins, with higher-level responses clearly explaining the significance of a lower baked margin beneath a lava flow due to contact metamorphism.

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Question 2:

This was a highly accessible and generally high-scoring question. Very few candidates did not attempt the extended response question. In (a)(i), most candidates achieved high marks, with any errors usually arising from incorrect calculation of mean grain size or misclassification of sorting. In (a)(ii), the majority correctly identified Rock Unit E as sandstone. In (b), candidates performed very well, with most correctly identifying the dinosaur footprint as a trace fossil and determining the direction of movement. In (b)(iii), there was a clear improvement compared to previous series, with most candidates accurately completing the tally chart, although a few added totals incorrectly. In (b)(iv), rose diagrams were generally well plotted, though some lacked precision in shading, preventing access to full marks. In (c), most candidates correctly identified ripple marks, but fewer were able to accurately interpret their orientation and relate this to footprint direction. In (d), the extended response question was well attempted and high scoring. The majority of candidates correctly identified that there were two different species of dinosaurs, referring to differences in the size and shape of the footprints. Many also recognised that the second statement was incorrect and supported this using evidence from Figure 2d and Table 5, often including data from the table. Higher-level responses evaluated the evidence more fully and recognised that ripple marks could indicate a beach environment but could also form in a fluvial setting. For the final bullet point, some candidates simply stated that ripples indicate a beach and that sandstones form on a beach, without explaining why this evidence supports the interpretation. Stronger responses explained this more clearly, for example by referring to and interpreting the texture of the sand or the processes responsible for ripple formation, and this level of explanation enabled access to the higher mark bands.

Question 3:

This question was generally well answered. In (a) and (b), most candidates correctly identified the trilobite and calculated its length accurately, often showing clear working. In (c), stronger responses compared both Fossils L and M using evidence from the scale bars, whereas weaker responses focused on only one of the fossils. In (d), many candidates successfully identified the environmental conditions for fossil preservation, including rapid burial, low energy conditions, and lack of oxygen. In (e), responses were generally strong, with candidates recognising factors contributing to the incomplete fossil record, such as decay of soft tissues, destruction by weathering and erosion, subduction and metamorphism, and the fact that many fossils have yet to be discovered.

Question 4:

Performance on this question was mixed. In (a)(i), the quality of fold sketches was generally good, with many candidates accurately representing the antiform and synform and the dip of limbs; however, some used rulers, resulting in less realistic geological representations. Higher-level responses included variation in bed thickness and number of beds. In (a)(ii), many candidates were able to measure the dip angle accurately, but explaining the difficulties of taking reliable dip and strike readings in the field proved more challenging. Stronger responses referred to issues such as uneven bedding surfaces or limited exposure, while vague references to human error were not credited. In (c)(i), most candidates correctly placed the fold axes using the appropriate symbol, although a significant number incorrectly drew both as horizontal. Higher-level responses correctly distinguished between the vertical and inclined fold axes. In (c)(ii), responses varied in quality; stronger answers compared dip values and axial plane orientation in detail, while weaker answers lacked specificity and did not make clear comparisons using evidence from the figure and map.

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Question 5:

This question proved to be a good discriminator. Most candidates attempted the incomplete map, with many gaining at least one mark for showing displacement or sketching Rock Units A and E to the correct width. However, fewer candidates correctly plotted both the direction and amount of displacement. Some candidates did not attempt the question. In (b), stronger responses drew effectively on evidence from part (a), recognising that the movement was horizontal and correctly identifying the fault as a strike-slip fault associated with shear stress. Weaker responses often misidentified the fault as normal or reverse and did not relate their answer to the evidence provided.

Question 6:

This question was more challenging for many candidates. In (a)(i), most candidates struggled to accurately plot the boundary between Rock Units B and C, particularly regarding both position and angle. In (a)(ii), the unconformity was correctly identified by many candidates. In (a)(iii), although this was an unfamiliar style of question, many candidates were able to extract the correct height values from the figure. In (b)(i), calculations of outcrop width and dip were generally successful, though strike direction was often incomplete. In (b)(ii), many candidates correctly identified the dyke and referred to its discordant relationship. Some candidates used discordance for reason 1 and then explained discordance for the second reason which gained no credit. Higher-level answers referred to a linear outcrop or the size of the dyke. In (c), most candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of permeability. For part (d), most candidates attempted the question and made good use of the information on Map 1. Many recognised that the spring could lead to flooding and the problems with drilling through hard crystalline igneous rock and weak shale. Higher-level answers referred to the high angle of dip of the shale leading to landslides.

Sketching Skills:

The overall quality of sketching was good. However, a common misconception was the drawing of grains rather than crystals in the igneous rock. Many candidates were able to draw crystals to scale using the scale bar, although the proportions between phenocrysts and groundmass were often inaccurate.
Sketches of folding were generally of a high standard, with many candidates accurately representing fold geometry, identifying fold types, and including the unconformity. Higher-level responses included variation in bed thickness, jointing, and the correct sketching of the synform with unequal limb dips. However, some candidates used rulers, which often resulted in less accurate representations of the beds.

Identification of Rocks, Fossils and Structures:

Most candidates correctly identified andesite, although some confused it with basalt. A recurring issue was the naming of rocks not included in the specification, such as gabbro or dolerite. The majority of candidates successfully identified the trilobite, unconformity, and dyke.

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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: 029 2240 4253
Email: geology@eduqas.co.uk
Qualification webpage: GCSE Geology | Eduqas

See other useful contacts here: Useful Contacts | Eduqas

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