GCE A Level Examiners' Report

Geology

A level

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 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.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner | Eduqas

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Executive Summary

Each of the three written-exam components had a similar structure to those seen in previous years. Overall, the performance of candidates on these was slightly better than that seen in 2025.

In Component 1, candidates generally showed good drawing skills and understood concepts such as uniformitarianism. Most were able to use a box and whisker plot effectively to determine if a result was anomalous. The construction of the cross-section was generally undertaken well. The answers to the extended writing fieldwork design question were of a significantly higher standard than last year, although some answers lacked the precise details required of a top-band response. Candidates confused the terms reliability and precision and most were unable to identify chalk using the microscopic features in an image. Answers requiring an appreciation of the influence of the weathering of silicate rocks on global climate, or the principles of Samaruim:Neodymium dating were weaker.

In Component 2, candidates generally performed well in response to the two 6-mark QER questions. Answers related to the poor preservation of the Ediacaran fauna, the formation of turbidite sequences, and describing a photomicrograph of a metamorphic rock were generally competently undertaken. Candidates had more difficulty recalling information related to the generation of intermediate magma, flocculation and metamorphic processes.

In Component 3, candidates displayed good knowledge of aseismic building design addressed in Section A, and generally tackled mathematical questions competently, including how to read ‘stereonets’ in the mapwork section. However, the term ‘median’ was surprisingly poorly understood. Topics in which candidates did not perform particularly well included issues of construction on industrial brownfield sites, the influence of the distribution of mountain ranges on global climate in option 1, precise knowledge of the geological record of Devonian and Carboniferous rocks in Britain in option 2, and reasons for the age distribution of rocks in continental areas in option 3.

It is important that candidates pay attention to answering the question fully, using all the key information given in the stem of the question. Candidates should also make sure that their answers appropriately address the command word in each question.

Areas for improvement	**Classroom resources**	**Brief description of resource**
Samarium:Neodymium Dating	SM:ND DATING FACTSHEET	Includes a fact sheet on Samarium:Neodymium dating
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 more complex topic areas	KNOWLEDGE ORGANISERS	A collection of knowledge organisers to support the learning of AS and A level Geology.

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GEOLOGY

GCE A level

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COMPONENT 1: GEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Overview of the Component

As in line with previous years Section A had two stand-alone questions with Section B being an integrated geological practical paper that included a map, specimens and photographs.

The topics covered this year included: metalliferous ore bodies, climate change during the Phanerozoic, corals, igneous rocks, samarium/neodymium dating, rock cycle processes, structural geology and investigating contact metamorphism.

The following skills were assessed: mineral testing and identification using a key, drawing fossils, interpreting a box and whisker plot, identifying and interpreting igneous rocks using both photomicrographs and hand specimens, planning a field investigation, geological map interpretation, drawing a geological cross-section and laboratory investigations.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Question 1

Most candidates gave high scoring descriptions of the size and shape of the ore body and it was pleasing to see that nearly all candidates were able to include numerical data in their answers. The task of explaining how the ore body formed differentiated well between candidates. The main reason for candidates not gaining full marks on part (a)(iii) was a lack of explanation as to the significance of the ore body being covered by an impermeable clay. Nearly all candidates scored full marks on part (b) of the question.

Question 2

A significant number of candidates did not appreciate the difference in units used in this question and therefore did not get the correct magnification. The identification of chalk proved to be surprisingly difficult for the candidates, with fewer than 5% of the cohort giving this answer. However, most candidates had little difficulty in explaining the conditions needed for the formation of chalk. While some candidates were able to give a detailed description as to how and why oxygen isotopes can be used to interpret past climates, a significant minority thought that the changes in the oxygen isotope ratios were to do with the ages of the rocks. Part (c) was generally well answered but it was clear that some candidates did not know which periods made up the Palaeozoic. Very few candidates recognised that weathering of silicate rocks can lead to climate cooling.

Question 3

This proved to be the most accessible question on the paper. It was pleasing to see that the vast majority of candidates had little difficulty in producing a high scoring diagram of the coral fossil and most were able to quote the principle of uniformitarianism as well as use it to explain past environmental conditions. Nearly all candidates had no difficulty in using the data in the box and whisker plot to decide if the result was anomalous.

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Question 4

This proved to be the least accessible question on the paper. The most common incorrect answers for part (a) were granite and schist. A significant number of candidates used sedimentary terms such as well-sorted and angular when describing the specimen in part (c). The majority of candidates chose not to draw a line on the graph for part (d)(i) but instead identified a point on the graph. In such cases, credit could still be given elsewhere in this question if candidates had made reference to the relative ages of Rock Unit D and Rock Unit B. Part (d)(ii) proved to be a good discriminator. While most candidates gained some credit in section e very few went on to discuss more than just the cross-cutting relationship between Rock Unit D and Rock Unit B

Question 5

The most common mistakes when drawing the specimen were the failure to show that it was poorly sorted and drawing all the grains as perfect circles. Part (b) differentiated well between the candidates with most correctly interpreting the map evidence. The most common error was the claim that Rock Unit D contained quartz. The main reason for candidates not being awarded full marks was when they failed to discuss the grain/crystal size of the two rocks.

Question 6

The overall quality of answers from this year's cohort was significantly better than those of last year. It was pleasing this year to see far fewer of the generic responses which included a lengthy discussion about potential health and safety issues followed by a detailed description of how to measure dip and strike in the field. The most common reason for candidates not being placed in the top band was a lack of detail with regards to the observations being suggested. For example, saying that they would look for way-up structures but then not naming any way up structures.

Question 7

Most candidates had little difficulty identifying the unconformity, but a significant minority did not draw an axial plane trace on the map. In part (c) nearly all candidates scored a mark for recognition that the line was sinuous (or words to that effect), however the majority of candidates were unable to identify the fault as a reverse fault.

Question 8

Completing the geological cross-section continues to be a good discriminator which again produces a range of marks. Although a few candidates achieved full marks the most common errors were to draw the G/E boundary at the surface rather than underneath the unconformity and failing to recognise the displacement of Rock Unit G by the fault. It was pleasing to see that the high overall quality of cross-sections from previous years was maintained.

Question 9

Most candidates were able to identify the variables correctly; the most common mistakes were getting them the wrong way round or not giving the full title with answers such as "temperature" not being credit worthy as it wasn't clear which temperature the candidate was referring to. A number of candidates in part (b) confused reliability with precision and discussed taking multiple readings and then calculating a mean value. Candidates scored highly on part (c) and most were able to give a sensible suggestion as to why an anomalous result had occurred.

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COMPONENT 2: GEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AND PROCESSES

Overview of the Component

The 2026 Component 2 paper comprised of six questions totalling 90 available marks, including two six-mark QER questions. Topics covered this year included: sediment settling velocities, diversity of fauna through geological time, turbidite deposits, plate tectonic volcanic/seismic activity, mass extinction evidence, and metamorphic textures. Skills tested included interpretation of the Hjulström curve, a triangular graph, Sepkoski's curves, maps of geohazard distribution, evolutionary models, and depth-temperature graphs. The performance by candidates in this examination was generally in-line with past Component 2 examinations.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Question 1

On the whole, candidates showed skill when interpreting graph data. Common errors included the assumption that settling velocity decreases when grain density increases, or confusing erosion velocity with settling velocity. The triangular graph was handled with ease, but some candidates exhibited a poor understanding of flocculation and how it happens.

Question 2

Although answered well, a lack of precision when reading graphs let candidates down. They showed a reasonable understanding of the poor preservation of Ediacaran fauna and responded confidently to the first six-mark QER of the paper. A surprising number of candidates failed to interpret Figure 2b, instead relying on their own knowledge of the global events which affected diversity through time, which of course the question does not require. It would seem that future candidates would benefit from practising exam technique and learning to recognise the requirements of questions such as these.

Question 3

Surprisingly few candidates recognised load casts and flame structures, and even fewer were able to convincingly explain how these structures form; candidates commonly discussed lithified units rather than sediments at the time of formation. Candidates generally understood the turbidite sequences well and were able to comprehensibly interpret the data.

Question 4

Although three-mark 'describe' questions are a staple of Eduqas papers, candidates still seem to struggle with identifying three valid points with many repeating key points or, for example, missing an opportunity to use the scale. Others referred to specific plates when it became clear they had intended to refer to specific boundaries. Very few demonstrated an understanding of how intermediate lavas are generated in subduction zones with a lack of key terminology or incorrect use of terminology as a primary reason. A great number fixated on the oceanic lithosphere itself melting when attempting to explain flux melting.

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When questioned on volcanic monitoring techniques most were able to make a sensible suggestion but 'explained' the technique by simply implying that the gas/harmonic tremors or angle of slope would increase due to an imminent eruption without explaining why. In part (b) of the question the best answers referenced depth of earthquakes in relation to their distribution whereas other candidates had only focussed on earthquake distribution. Only a very small number of strong answers correctly interpreted the difference in angle of subduction at the two contrasting plate boundaries. These same candidates were typically able to identify the limitations in the data, whereas weaker answers provided vague statements without substance.

Question 5

The term 'Gradualism' evaded many in question 5(a)(i), but most were able to describe differences between the two evolutionary models. Most demonstrated a faint recollection of the Goldschmidt Classification but often 'siderophile' or 'chalcophile' were misspelled and vaguely resembled a correct answer. The second six-mark QER question of the paper was answered well overall with candidates able to confidently interpret a range of data and make meaningful references to their distribution.

Question 6

Candidates in general struggled to provide an equation for line 'L' but performed better when remembering their aluminium silicate polymorphs or deciphering the metamorphic photomicrograph. Low scoring responses usually confused metamorphic terminology with sedimentary and/or igneous terms. Most were able to interpret the foliation and the principal stresses that had led to this mineral alignment. In the final question of the paper a significant proportion of candidates disappointingly referred to melting of rock during metamorphic processes which tended to be the fundamental misconception which undermined their response.

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COMPONENT 3: GEOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS

Overview of the Component

The Component 3 paper produced a wide range of marks with candidates able to access all parts of the paper. Candidates who used the data in the figures and read the questions carefully were able to achieve good marks across all sections of the paper. The most successful candidates paid attention to the command words in the questions, notably explain questions, and were able to justify their answers with sound geological knowledge. High scoring candidates were also able to make links between the different sections of questions to allow them to formulate their responses with all the relevant information. There were many good examples of mathematical skills being employed to good effect throughout the paper.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Question 1

This question focussed on the geological understanding required to excavate a shallow tunnel in an area of Quaternary sediments and brownfield Anthropocene deposits. It was well answered with many candidates able to recognise the properties of the sedimentary deposits and how they would influence the construction of the tunnel. Weaker candidates found it hard to explain the extension of the side-walls into the mudstone, but many were able to recognise the importance of the competence of the older rock. The calculation was accurately completed by a majority of candidates, though a minority were unable to achieve full marks as a result of not giving the answer to 3 significant figures. Part (d) saw a wide range of marks with many candidates giving very general answers about environmental impact and failing to consider the nature of the material being excavated. Some stronger answers linked the removal of the lower permeability silt and clay with an increased risk to the groundwater in the aquifer from potentially contaminated made ground.

Question 2

This question was written to explore the limitations of using return periods as a predictive tool for earthquakes. Responses to this question showed mostly good understanding of earthquakes, though the first part of the calculations often failed to divide the time period by the number of earthquakes minus 1. In part (a)(iii) many candidates were able to suggest reasons for an increased interval between major earthquakes in the sequence and evaluate to some degree the efficacy of the method. Most candidates were able to articulate reasons for earthquakes occurring in the Parkfield area and any patterns in this. Answers for part (c) often focussed on successful strategies to reduce the destructive effects of seismic activity in building design. A minority of candidates selected unworkable strategies such as moving the cities or predicting earthquakes to facilitate evacuation; such answers did not receive credit.

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Section B

Question 3

This question was designed to highlight some key features of this area of geology. Most candidates were able to access part a(i) very easily, utilising the information found within the geological column. Part (a)(ii) proved slightly more challenging, with many candidates suggesting deformation or dip as a reason for the wedge-shaped units. The most successful candidates were able to reference lateral discontinuity or facies change as part of their explanation. Part (b) focussed on the faulting in the area. Many candidates were able to correctly identify the fault, with those achieving full marks fully utilising the data provided on the map. Reference to evidence, as well as explanation, was key to gaining full marks. In part (b)(ii), candidates generally performed well, as if they had identified the fault incorrectly, this error was carried forward, and many showed a good understanding of principal stress relationships.

Question 4

Question 4 focussed on the outcrop patterns and potential fold structures located in this area. Part (a) was answered most successfully by those who focussed on description rather than interpretation. Candidates who were able to accurately describe the shape of the outcrop pattern with reference to compass directions achieved well. Parts (b) and (c) focussed more on the interpretation of the structures. In part (b)(i), candidates showed a good understanding of how to read data presented on equal-area polar 'stereonets'. Those who were most successful were able to provide an appropriate level of detail for the marks available, describing ranges, using figures, and making reference to compass directions. In part (b)(ii), many candidates either did not read the question carefully or did not understand the term *median*, instead giving the mean. Part (c) required candidates to evaluate a statement regarding the folding and outcrop structure. The most successful candidates were able to use data from the map to explain how the outcrop pattern appeared to represent a plunging fold but used both the map and Figure 4 to explain why it was, in fact, not folded.

Question 5

This question focussed on the lithologies and landslides present on the map. In part (a) most candidates correctly identified the lithologies present; however, many could not fully describe how they caused the slope to be unstable. The most successful candidates correctly identified the issues associated with interbedded permeable and impermeable units, making reference to pore fluid pressure and reduced friction or cohesion between the grains. Many candidates referred to fluids lubricating bedding planes; this was not credited. In part (a)(iii), candidates were required to focus on the potential for the structure, rather than the lithology, to be the cause of the landslide. The most successful candidates did not mention lithologies and instead referred to dip direction, dip angle, and potential faulting as causes of the landslide. Part (b) was answered well, with most candidates able to correctly identify and explain the methods used to stabilise the slope. Part (c) was answered most successfully by those who were able to explain why the lithologies and structure made the slope at this location more stable.

Question 6

Question 6 focussed on the coal seams and their potential repurposing for geothermal energy. Part (a)(i) was accessed well by many candidates, who were able to calculate the correct depth using trigonometry. Part (a)(ii) required the use of the two different scales on the geological column. Most candidates gained marks for correct measurements and use of scale; however, few managed to combine all the information to calculate the correct depth.

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Part (b) focussed on the repurposing of the abandoned mine shafts in this area to produce geothermal energy. The most common error was failing to relate this method of energy production to the specific area. Instead, candidates limited themselves to general discussions of the effectiveness of this method. Those who were most successful utilised the figure and linked it to the geology of Ironbridge, as well as their answers to the previous parts, to produce a sound evaluation.

Section C

Quaternary Geology

Question 7

This question was designed to contrast global eustatic sea level changes with the more localised effects of isostatic sea level change. It produced many good answers, with eustatic sea level being generally well understood. Many candidates recognised how a short stadial episode could slow the rate of post-glacial sea level rise. There were fewer good responses to the question about isostatic uplift with candidates frequently showing a limited understanding of the process. The most successful candidates demonstrated in part (b)(ii) that they could synthesise the information from the earlier part of the question and their knowledge of the content, to explain the contrasting rate and extent of the two different processes of sea level change and how that could be seen in the area around Craignure.

Question 8

This question was written to examine the understanding of oxygen isotope palaeoclimatic data in contrasting settings, terrestrial ice cores and marine microfossils. Only a minority of candidates showed a secure understanding of the palaeoclimatic signal in ice cores, with many confused answers seen. The age calculation saw more candidates being able to produce an accurate answer than has been the case when similar questions have been asked in the past. Some candidates did fail to gain full marks for not giving an answer in the units required. A few candidates did manage to give answers that were several orders of magnitude greater than the age of the Earth. The data in Figure 8 did give a maximum age that could be expected (younger than 55.3 ka) that candidates could use to verify their answers; the application of checking strategies should be encouraged. Many candidates did recognise the use of the volcanic ash layers as isochrones. However, only the strongest answers evaluated an alternative dating technique with very few candidates using the result of their calculations to place these cores within the scope of radiocarbon dating.

Question 9

The Quaternary QER question focussed on how the changing distribution of continents and mountains influence large scale climatic changes. Many answers to this question focussed on features of mountain belts other than their distribution or on generic statements about continents at the Equator. Those candidates who scored well discussed the effects of changes such as the opening of the Drake Passage as part of the southward drift of Antarctica and its effect on cooling through the Cenozoic, and the growth of the Himalaya preventing the transfer of heat and precipitation from equatorial to polar latitudes in the northern hemisphere. A full range of marks were awarded.

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Geological Evolution of Britain

Question 10

This question was designed to test understanding of some of the palaeomagnetic and palaeontological data related to the Caledonian Orogeny. Part (a) considered polar wandering curves for North America and Europe. Candidates generally demonstrated a good understanding of palaeomagnetism, however the application of this to interpreting polar wandering curves was much more varied with only the most successful candidates able to achieve full marks for this skill. A majority of candidates did not recognise the significance of the separate paths prior to 370 Ma and the parallel paths after that point. Most candidates were able to describe the graptolite faunal distribution but only a minority explained how continental separation would result in different faunal assemblages. Stronger answers related the occurrence of the Southern Upland Trench to the closure of the Iapetus Ocean.

Question 11

This question was written to examine knowledge of the Palaeogene Igneous Province and how remote sensing could be used to locate its submerged features. Part (a) was generally answered well, with most candidates justifying the rock identification accurately. The age calculation saw more candidates being able to produce an accurate answer than has been the case when similar questions have been asked in the past. Some candidates did fail to gain full marks for not giving an answer in the units required. A few candidates did manage to give answers that were several orders of magnitude greater than the age of the Earth. The data in Figure 11a did give an indication of age that could be expected (within the Cenozoic era) that candidates could use to verify their answers; the application of checking strategies should be encouraged. Many candidates suggested suitable geophysical techniques, the most successful were able to explain the techniques with reference to the fact that the underwater large igneous intrusions are all mafic.

Question 12

The QER question for this theme focussed on the change from an arid/semi-arid tropical climate in the Devonian to the humid equatorial climate in the Carboniferous. Many answers to this question showed an insecure grasp of the sedimentary record of the Devonian and Carboniferous periods with few responses giving specific detail of the rock types in Britain of these periods and how they relate to climate and palaeolatitude. The responses that scored well wrote exclusively about the British sedimentary record rather than from other areas, such as the Carboniferous glaciation in Gondwana, and made explicit links between the climatic conditions and the rocks deposited at those times. The best answers explained this in the context of Britain’s northward drift in the Upper Palaeozoic. A full range of marks were awarded.

Geology of the Lithosphere

Question 13

This question focussed on the structure and seismology of the oceanic lithosphere. In part (a), most candidates were able to identify the missing layer. What candidates found more challenging was explaining the increase in velocity observed at the Moho. The most successful candidates linked the change in composition to the change in seismic velocity. Many simply described the change or failed to link the change in properties to the change in composition. Part (b)(i) was a familiar question requiring candidates to describe changes shown on a graph. Marks were most commonly lost because candidates did not fully utilise the figures on the graph and failed to reference both velocity and depth.

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In the next part, candidates generally identified the correct temperature; however, many continued to state that the mantle was semi-molten or partially molten, despite the figure showing that the solidus had not been crossed. In the final part of this question, the most successful candidates linked the data from the figure and recognised that the geotherm being close to the solidus caused the material to behave in a more ductile manner, thereby reducing rigidity and incompressibility.

Question 14

The focus of this question was palaeomagnetism and seafloor spreading. The first part required candidates to correctly identify the location of an ocean ridge from a set of palaeomagnetic data. Those who were most successful utilised symmetry and recognised that it had to occur during a period of normal polarity. In part (a)(ii) most candidates responded very well. It is worth noting that it is the magnetic fields of the minerals that align, rather than the minerals themselves. This is a common misconception; however, the concept of alignment was still credited. Part (a)(iii) required candidates to consider the importance of continental lavas in the calculation of seafloor spreading rates. Those who were most successful noted that these lavas can be accurately dated and therefore allow the timing of global magnetic reversals recorded on the sea floor to be established. In part (b)(i) it was pleasing to see that many candidates were able to use the equation correctly. The final part of this question was not answered well by many candidates, as it relied on an understanding of the error margins associated with dating methods and the use of magnetic symmetry when assessing spreading rates. The most successful candidates noted that 200,000 years was within the error margins of the dating method and that a conclusion regarding spreading symmetry could not be confirmed from the magnetic reversals at only two locations.

Question 15

The QER question this year focussed on the distribution of the ages of continental rocks. Those who scored well described the distribution thoroughly in terms of both lateral and vertical age patterns. They explained in detail the processes that lead to these variations in age, including superposition, erosion, and deposition. The age of rocks along coastlines was linked to accretion and deposition, while those in the centres of land masses were linked to cratons and shields. The highest-scoring responses also recognised processes that could disrupt this pattern, utilising knowledge of igneous processes and the Wilson Cycle. Many candidates focussed primarily on explaining the processes and failed to describe the expected pattern in sufficient detail or merely inferred it from their explanations. Candidates should always be encouraged to answer the specific question asked rather than relying on the repetition of rote-learned material.

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PRACTICAL ENDORSEMENT

General Comments

The large majority of centres visited demonstrated a good grasp of the principles behind Practical Endorsement (PE). However, there were a few cases where centres needed additional support to satisfy the regulatory requirements. Most often problems occurred when there was a sudden change in staffing at a centre, e.g. due to long-term illness. Where there were issues, these were all sorted by the time a second visit took place at the centre.

The following is a summary of observations made from the monitoring reports together with a brief commentary:

- Suitable plans of practical work were prepared by the departments and used by all members of teaching staff. These plans were either incorporated into the Scheme of Work or kept as a separate document in a few centres. Both methods were considered acceptable. Good plans allowed for the development of skills within Practical Endorsement and ensured all elements of each CPAC were covered. They detailed the CPAC to be assessed in each practical, the proposed time in the teaching year where it would be carried out and provided evidence that the centre would cover all the apparatus and techniques identified in Appendix A part (c) of the specification. *Centres are reminded that this plan must be available to the monitor during visits.*
- Fieldwork was used as an important aspect of developing and assessing PE*. Fieldwork is an extremely useful vehicle for assessing higher level skills such as CPAC2 and 5. It also provides a good environment in which CPAC3 and 4 can be assessed. It is necessary to train candidates to do fieldwork successfully. The "lab-based fieldwork" provides a useful teaching resource to introduce fieldwork and also forms a good model for delivering and assessing CPAC within fieldwork.*
- Candidates were informed of the CPAC assessed in the introduction of the observed practicals. In many cases, the candidate worksheets also identified the CPAC that would be assessed in the class further reinforcing what the teacher was looking for. *This is all good practice. Candidates should know what you are assessing and how this will be judged.*
- Accurate and up-to-date Teacher and Candidate Records were maintained by all the centres visited. These were recorded in an Excel Spreadsheet, often showing the CPAC element (e.g. CPAC3(a)) achieved in each practical*. It is appropriate to remind centres that although it is not necessary to record CPAC to the detail of each element in the spreadsheet, candidates must evidence competence of all aspects of each CPAC. Monitors will check for this in a visit. Centres are strongly advised to annotate the candidate work showing the element achieved (e.g., CPAC 4(a) or CPAC 4(a&b)).*
- There was evidence of feedback to candidates. Feedback was given either verbally or in writing. This *is good practice. Practical endorsement is intended to help candidates develop good practical skills, and feedback helps complete the learning loop.*

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- It is unusual for a team of teachers to deliver geology, but where this does occur, there must be evidence of standardisation. Evidence of standardisation could include departmental minutes showing time was given to discussing standardisation and documentation showing cross-marking between teachers on selected work. ***Note:*** *Standardisation is a requirement of Practical Endorsement and is recorded in the monitor's report of the centre. It must be implemented for a centre to pass the monitoring visit.*
- In some centres, descriptors of minimum standards necessary to achieve a CPAC in a practical were available to all teachers on the course. This is judged good practice and is particularly helpful in large departments where there are many teachers of the subject. *See for example, CPAC Pen Portraits on the EDUQAS website.*

Notes on Assessment of CPAC

High standards should be set early in the course by the teacher, with clear explanations provided for any unmet standards.

CPAC 1

This CPAC assesses the candidate's ability to follow written instructions accurately. The monitor will respect the judgment of the teacher unless there is clear evidence of incorrect assessment.

If a teacher needs to intervene or interpret instructions for a candidate, then this CPAC should not be awarded.

CPAC 2

This CPAC involves higher-level skills and requires careful planning to ensure sufficient development time before assessment. Fieldwork presents excellent opportunities for assessment, and these opportunities should be used. The 'Lab-based fieldwork exercise', as already mentioned, is recommended as a template for generating evidence toward this CPAC.

It is **not** necessary to assess every element of CPAC2 each time this CPAC is assessed. However, it is a requirement that each element of CPAC2 is met during the course. If you are monitored, the monitor will look at the coverage of each element.

Monitors also saw a good use of extension activities (e.g. to SP20) and practical tasks where candidates select and justify equipment usage are also beneficial.

CPAC 3

Make use of those opportunities where there are greater risks when assessing this criterion. Fieldwork is an important and meaningful place to assess CPAC3, and evidence this is done will be part of the monitor's visit. Other opportunities of course, also exist in the class practical activities.

CPAC 3(a)

This is best evidenced by a simple written risk assessment. However, there is some variation in the quality of risk assessments accepted. For this reason, it is important to set standards with candidates first before assessing their work.

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Candidates should first be instructed in what makes a good risk assessment. Take the opportunity to discuss the nature of hazards and risks with the class for a field trip scenario before asking candidates to devise one.

When the candidates draw up a risk assessment, it is expected that they identify the most significant hazards and risks and have considered suitable controls. If this is not done, do not award the risk assessment.

CPAC 3(b)

Direct observations of candidates working safely by the teacher working during practical sessions or fieldwork will be accepted by the monitor for 3(b). Do not award this for attendance. If candidates need to be reminded of safety protocol, they have not met the criterion.

If this is assessed in the observed practical by the monitor, then please expect questions about the candidate's performance from the monitor.

CPAC 4

This CPAC deals with both qualitative and quantitative data. There are multiple opportunities in geology to both develop and assess this skill.

There still is a tendency for centres to be too lenient when awarding this skill. It is surprising how poor some candidates are at correctly recording data. Ensure that you demand high standards from early in the course for this skill and take time to ensure candidates understand what is required from them. Make sure that when data is recorded, the data is recorded to the correct precision. Do not accept shoddy work. Give candidates clear guidance on what is expected of them when they record data (see for example, the points identified below).

Please read the following carefully and act on the comments where necessary.

CPAC 4(a) Making accurate observations

Ensure that the following points are borne in mind when awarding this CPAC:

- Observations should be made directly into the candidate's practical books/spreadsheet. Do not award this CPAC if the candidate writes results onto scraps of paper to copy up later.
- Do **not** award this CPAC if you provide a template table to the candidates for recording results. Templates may be useful to teach candidates a good approach to recording data early in the course, but when it comes to assessment candidates **must** devise their own tables. Where necessary, remove table templates from the documentation you provide to candidates and allow candidates to construct their own tables.
- The tables which candidates construct **must** have appropriate headings and units, where relevant. Please maintain high standards here. All candidates can achieve this.
- The units must be written in the table column head and not in the body of the table. If units are missing, do **not** award criteria.

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When the candidate draws a diagram, please ensure good practice is followed before awarding the criterion. For example, where relevant:

- the diagram is reasonably accurate
- a sharp pencil is used
- there is a title
- continuous clear lines are used
- key structures are labelled
- scale bar present
- annotation lines are straight, and annotations written horizontally
- shading not used
- field sketches should have compass directions on each side of the sketch.

CPAC 4(b) obtaining accurate, precise and sufficient data

Please carefully check candidates' data:

- Is it recorded to appropriate precision? Too often centres are lenient on this. Make sure that recordings are to the correct number of decimal places. If data readings are not consistently recorded by a candidate, then do **not** award the criterion. Be particularly careful to check that candidates are recording readings from an instrument correctly. You should be walking around the classroom checking on candidates as they record some of their values.
- Is there sufficient data? Is the data what you expect? Please set suitable standards at the beginning of the course. It does not matter if a candidate did not always achieve the criterion.

CPAC 5

This important higher-level skill should be assessed from early in the course. Occasionally centres do not take up the assessment opportunities provided by the work done by candidates. There really is no shortage of suitable assessment opportunities. CPAC 5 has two elements:

(a) Uses appropriate software and/or tools to process data, carry out research and report findings.
(b) Sources of information are cited, demonstrating that research has taken place, supporting planning and conclusions.

CPAC 5(a)

There should be evidence of candidates processing data using graphs and calculations. Centres should require candidates to use software (e.g. Excel) to draw graphs on a number of occasions. **SP19** and **SP20** are good places to use Excel to generate graphs. In order to do this to an acceptable standard, candidates will often need instruction in using Excel.

Make sure graphs are constructed correctly, i.e. there is a title, each axis is correctly labelled, points plotted correctly, an appropriate scale used, etc. Candidates will need to be shown how to use Excel to correctly title graphs etc. It is evident that candidates do not always know how to use Excel appropriately. Excel graphs can often be disappointing and show the candidate does not know how to use this powerful tool. Please ensure candidates are taught how to use Excel first.

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- Processing data also involves carrying out calculations. This may involve transformation of data using mathematical equations, statistical analysis etc.

CPAC5(a) also includes 'carry out research and report findings'. The report does not need to be long. Some centres seem to imagine that long detailed reports are necessary. This is a misunderstanding; it may simply be the conclusion they draw from their data. However, it is not appropriate to award this CPAC for a one-word answer. A conclusion requires a reasoned response to the data observed.

The research may be internet or book-based.

CPAC 5(b)

This is not a difficult CPAC to evidence, but can be poorly evidenced in candidate work. A few centres can be commended for having candidates demonstrating referencing on multiple occasions; a few of these even using the Harvard System (which exceeds our requirements for this CPAC).

Please try to get candidates in the habit of evidencing this every time they source data (e.g. a density value) or indeed any information they quote. This should happen from **early** in the course and you want it to become second nature to candidates. The information may come from a textbook, journal, website, EDUQAS data sheet. It is understood that candidates can be reluctant to do this, but it is the place of the teacher to ensure candidates understand why this is an essential skill to develop.

Summary

- Successful delivery of Practical Endorsement needs careful thought and planning. Make sure that there are ample opportunities for candidates to evidence all elements of each CPAC statement over the two years of the course.
- Set high standards from early in the course. Do not be frightened to give 'not achieved'. However, ensure that you give good feedback when students fail to meet the standard so that they have the opportunity to improve their performance next time.
- Give suitable feedback to candidates so that they can improve their skills.
- Field trips are an ideal place to assess CPAC once candidates have some experience, but this does require some thought beforehand. Which CPAC statements can be assessed? Where is the evidence going to be generated? The field notebook is an obvious place e.g. for CPAC 3(a), 4 and, when assessed, CPAC 2. If it is evidence from observation (e.g. CPAC 1 or 3(b)), how are you going to record this? Will a checklist help? Don't be overambitious but don't lose the opportunity.
- Inform candidates on whether they have achieved Practical Endorsement before the final outcomes are submitted to Eduqas in accordance with JCQ requirements.
- Finally, make Practical Endorsement a servant of the subject. Use Practical Endorsement as part of an assessment for learning strategy. Do not let it become an end in itself.

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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: AS and A Level Geology | Eduqas

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