GCE Examiners' Report

Geography

GCE

Summer 2025

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 unit.

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	WJEC 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.wjec.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 WJEC 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 unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.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.***

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC 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.wjec.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 WJEC subject page.
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Executive Summary

Though performance in the AS units continues to be much weaker than in pre-pandemic years, outcomes at A level were encouraging once again this year.

In unit 1 candidates showed strong understanding of coastal and glacial processes, including beach profiles, wave direction, fluvioglacial landforms, and tectonic hazards. However, knowledge of biotic coastal processes and coastal management was weaker. Use of diagrams supported those with less confident written communication.

While candidates generally used resources well, they should avoid copying content and focus on interpreting questions accurately, especially in high-tariff responses. Skills in map interpretation, percentage calculation, and comparison were stronger, though analytical questions require deeper data manipulation. Improved use of geographical terminology and clearer expression would enhance performance across all assessment objectives.

Most candidates found the unit 2 paper accessible, with few unanswered questions. While understanding of question requirements was generally good, extended responses often lacked depth, especially in Section A, leading to generic answers. Candidates responded well to command words like "compare" and "describe," using resources effectively. Use of located examples improved this year, though definitions of ‘central urban areas varied’. Centres should ensure that candidates are able to apply their case study material correctly and in line with specification terminology. Question 4 was a good discriminator, but many struggled to describe sampling strategies. In Question 5, responses lacked clarity, evidence, and suggestions for further research.

Unit 3 is demanding for candidates and requires them to demonstrate broad knowledge, understanding, and skills, including extended writing and synoptic analysis. The paper was largely accessible, with few rubric errors, though some questions—such as 2(a)(ii), 5(b), and 6(b)—proved challenging across the ability range. Extended writing responses showed improved balance in question choice, reflecting strong engagement with the specification. However, many candidates omitted shorter AO1 questions, despite producing strong extended answers. The paper effectively differentiated performance, with many candidates showing excellent knowledge and analytical skills. The 21st Century Challenges section remained a strength. Concerns included illegible handwriting and overly brief responses to high-mark questions. Candidates are reminded that all specification content is examinable and should guide revision.

The unit 4 paper continues to differentiate well, though issues with illegible handwriting and short responses to high-mark questions persist. Candidates should revise using the specification wording to ensure full coverage of examinable content. Candidates are expected to apply knowledge analytically and use geographical skills effectively within all questions. Concerns remain over outdated case studies in Tectonics and weak examples in Ecosystems. Essay responses on India and China showed marked improvement this year, with Question 7 (China) performing best. Energy was the most popular Section B theme, while India was least chosen. Some responses lacked focus, drifting from the question. However, the use of new case studies in the Africa theme (in response to specification adaptations) were encouraging and improved candidate responses.

Centres are commended for their effective administration in unit 5, 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.

AS LEVEL GEOGRAPHY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 1: CHANGING LANDSCAPES

Overview of the Unit

- This year saw a drop of 3.3 marks in the overall mean mark for this 96-mark paper and the mean mark remains considerably below that seen in pre-pandemic years.
- Candidates generally demonstrated strong knowledge of factors influencing beach profiles, wave direction, fluvioglacial landforms, and glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), with many also confidently discussing case studies related to governance and vulnerability to tectonic hazards.
- Understanding of tectonic processes and mantle characteristics was sound, although the use of geographical terminology and clarity of expression could be improved. Diagrams, particularly when well-annotated, proved valuable, especially for those with weaker written communication.
- However, there were, once again, notable gaps in knowledge regarding elements of physical geography e.g. biotic processes at the coast and the management of coastal environments.
- In terms of application (AO2), performance in the coasts and glaciation sections was generally strong, with candidates making good use of resources provided as stimuli—though, in Section B they should avoid copying information without offering any further analysis in relation to the AO2 commands of assess or examine. Careful reading of questions, especially those with higher tariffs, remains essential to ensure accurate focus on command words and topics.
- For AO3, candidates showed proficiency in describing patterns on large-scale maps, calculating percentages, and writing effective comparative statements, though they must avoid presenting two separate descriptions when asked to compare. Additionally, questions requiring analysis demand more data manipulation to access the highest marks.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Coastal landscapes

Q.1 **(a)** **(i)** Many candidates expressed themselves precisely and gave structured answers with clear comparative statements, recognising both similarities and differences between the beach profiles. A small minority did not understand the diagram, referring to changes in sea level rather than the beach profile. Again, a small number of candidates drifted into explanation which cannot be credited. The main area for improvement is quality of written communication. Finally, for a skills question (AO3) the use of the scale must be very accurate, approximations are not credited.

(ii) The majority of answers were correct and included useful development points that demonstrated good application of knowledge. The most common errors were to refer to sea level change or longshore drift, neither of which clearly explains the change in beach height and shape. Sea level change is too gradual, and there must be an overarching reason why longshore drift would become suddenly significant.

(b) A significant number of candidates did not attempt this question. In addition, there were many incorrect answers suggesting that many candidates did not know what biotic factors were. Incorrect answers discussed the role of erosional processes or longshore drift mainly. The best answers discussed either coral reefs or sand dunes, less often mangroves. There was some excellent knowledge and understanding of these landforms and candidates are well prepared to address the AO2 element of the question, namely examining the role of biotic processes. Many candidates discussed the role of biotic weathering and, while it was possible to achieve full marks, this was generally a less effective approach.

Q.2 **(a)** **(i)** The diagram was accessible to all candidates, but the analysis of pattern was generally limited. Very few candidates achieved band 3 as they tended to describe the with very little analysis. Manipulation of the data was required for band 3 e.g. calculating the difference between the highest and second highest category or grouping results to calculate totals. The weakest answers used straight lifts from the resource, listing directions and percentages. Better answers recognised the pattern and attempted to describe the broader trends.

(ii) A very well answered question showing good application of knowledge. Prevailing wind direction was the most common answer and candidates followed up by explaining that wind creates and drives the waves. This explanation was missing from the weaker answers. Poor phrasing was the biggest problem which sometimes limited marks, as the meaning was not clear enough.

(b) Again, significant numbers of candidates did not attempt this question. Some that did answer had the wrong focus and discussed management of coastal processes that impact on human activity i.e. sea defences. Some candidates attempted to twist the focus of the question by arguing that sea defences are there to manage erosion caused by humans. Equally there were some excellent answers with detailed knowledge of up-to-date case studies and candidates were strong at the AO2 element of the question, namely assessing the success of the strategy. Most common answers related to fencing off areas of damaged coastline or providing footpaths and educational signposts to control erosion of cliffs or dunes.

Section A: Glaciated landscapes

Q.3 **(a)** **(i)** Candidates found this question challenging. Many candidates misunderstood the x axis, mistaking it for time, and some candidates ignored or misunderstood the relevance of the bedrock. Weaker answers lost focus on ice thickness and discussed gradient or fluctuations on the ice surface.

(ii) This was an accessible question with many candidates achieving 2 marks for “increased snowfall has led to increased accumulation”. Some candidates failed to recognise an increase in mass balance for the third mark.

(b) An accessible question and most candidates were able to identify a fluvioglacial landform. Eskers, kames and outwash plains were popular choices. Many answers had good quality of explanation for AO1, with strong use of terminology and concepts. Most were able to describe landform formation but failed to examine the role of different processes, limiting the AO2 marks for this question. Some candidates failed to focus on one landform. The use of diagrams to support answers worked well for this question.

Q.4 **(a)** **(i)** This was an accessible question with candidates able to describe the overall pattern of cirque orientation. Some candidates use of percentages and ratio helped them achieve a Band 3 answer. Manipulation of data is required when asked to analyse. Weaker responses tended to produce a list of the number of cirques facing each direction.

(ii) The majority of candidates identified temperature as the reason for the orientation of cirques. The best answers developed this with an explanation of how north facing slopes had less sunlight leading to more snow accumulation. In weaker answers, candidates did not refer to aspect.

(b) The majority of candidates chose to answer the impacts of glacial processes and landform on human activity. The best answers wrote about strategies to combat Glacial Lake Outburst Floods and there was some excellent knowledge of case studies such as Nepal. Some candidates found this question challenging and failed to assess the success of strategies, with a focus on impacts instead. Strong answers for the impact of human activity on glacial processes and landforms clearly assessed the success of the strategy, for example, managing footpath erosion in Eryri National Park. In weaker answers there was reference to managing Climate Change on a global scale which limited AO1 and AO2 marks as it was difficult to link glacial processes to the strategy or link climate change to the glaciated area.

Section B: Tectonic Hazards

Q.5 **(i)(ii)(iii)** These were very accessible questions overall. The vast majority of candidates correctly identified the relationship between earthquake magnitude and frequency for (i), and most were able to choose an appropriate graph to show discrete data for (ii). The most common error was to choose a line graph (it is not continuous data). For the second mark a description of the technique was required; some candidates gave a justification instead. Again, the vast majority were able to calculate the percentage of total global deaths that occurred in Afghanistan for (iii).

Q.6 **(a)** Most candidates had a good understanding of the resource and are able to describe pattern effectively. There were some excellent answers which gave logically sequenced and precise language to describe distribution of earthquake intensity. Anomalies were noted and there was some excellent use of the scale which gains credit. Weaker answers gave estimates or incorrect distances from the scale and there was some confusion with interpretation of isolines.

(b) This question required application of knowledge for AO2. The best answers briefly described each resource and devoted most of the answer to elaborating on the nature and level of the risks in rural areas in comparison to urban areas. Many candidates were able to achieve at least band 2 by commenting simply on how different factors caused increased risk. Weaker answers failed to compare rural and urban areas and copied large chunks of information from the resource with little examination. Finally, identifying a factor and commenting “so this makes it difficult” is a band one statement as it leaves it to the reader to infer why there is a risk.

(c) This question and the resources were generally accessible and there were some very good answers that thoroughly analysed the data. Calculation of totals and percentages from Fig 6d, working out differences from Fig 6e, as well as ranking and grouping categories overall is good analysis. Recognising patterns and trends within the data allowed access to band 3. Weaker answers listed information or copied from the resource without comment on the significance. Few answers drifted into explanation which could not be credited.

(d) A high tariff question as there were a few demands on candidates. Most understood the question but tended to lose focus as the answer went on. Candidates should be encouraged to pause and re-read the question as they answer to ensure they address all of the requirements. Many candidates were able to clearly identify a range of physical and human factors and were able to examine the impact of these on the response to the earthquake. The best answers remembered to examine the relative importance of human and physical factors to reach band 3. Many candidates achieved band 2 by giving simple comments about how responses were affected but answers sometimes lacked balance or drifted into impacts of the earthquake. Weaker answers did not identify physical and human factors clearly and just gave a generalised list. Finally, stating that “this affected the response” is not enough for band 2, candidates must explain how.

Q.7 **(a)** This question tested knowledge and understanding for AO1.There were many excellent, well-structured answers with factors relating to governance fully explained in terms of impact on vulnerability. The use of case studies to answer this question worked very well and most compared Japan to Turkey / Syria. Weaker answers listed ideas or drifted into discussing economic factors with no reference to the role of governance at all. Many candidates waste a lot of space by repeating the question or giving long introductions to the topic.

(b) A potentially challenging question focussed on purely physical geography, but the majority were able to answer, and it differentiated well between candidates. Most were able to correctly identify that the mantle can flow and carry plates along, for band 1. The strongest answers discussed temperature gradients and pressure changes and related this to convection currents, ridge push and slab pull. There was some very in-depth knowledge of mantle characteristics and processes. A few candidates that did not attempt the question and quality of written communication was an issue with the weaker answers. The use of diagrams would be a good way to overcome this, and many candidates used them successfully.

(c) The best answers discussed health problems resulting from ash or injuries and explained clearly the impact on people's welfare, as well as living conditions after the eruption e.g. in temporary shelters. Many focussed on metal health and trauma which is again valid. The best answers focussed on a case study – most popular were Iceland, Nyiragongo and Montserrat. Many candidates were unable to identify social impacts clearly and drifted into demographic or economic impacts. Occasionally, a case study was written up with no specific reference to social impacts. Marks were limited due to a lack of clear focus.

AS LEVEL GEOGRAPHY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 2: CHANGING PLACES

Overview of the Unit

- Candidates found most of the paper accessible again this year. Not many questions were left unanswered. There was a slight decrease of 2.8 marks in the overall mean when compared to 2024, and the overall mean mark remains far lower than it was in pre-pandemic times.

- Positively, candidates generally found the resources accessible and were able to respond to the command word of compare and describe that was used in questions 1(a)(i) and 2(a)(i). Candidates were able to apply the knowledge gained from the resources effectively to suggest consequences in response to the questions set.

- The use of located places in responses was much improved, particularly in 1(b), although pupils' interpretation of central urban areas varied greatly. They must be able to accurately define the places they have studied in relation to the terminology used in the specification.

- While the mean mark for questions 4 and 5 were not too dissimilar to the previous year, the strengths and limitations of candidate responses differed. Question 4 proved to be a good discriminator with several excellent answers seen, but many were disappointing with candidates unable to accurately describe any sampling strategies used in their own fieldwork. Whilst most candidates did respond positively to the challenge in question 5, many could not present their findings clearly and could not support them with evidence or suggest valid opportunities for further research.

- One general feature of the majority of responses was a clear understanding of what was required but a lack of depth to the specific knowledge required for the extended response questions. Many responses, particularly in Section A, were generic as a result.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Changing Place

Q.1 **(a)** **(i)** Most candidates managed to identify the main trends in the graph of house prices increasing and also of fluctuation in house prices during the twenty-year period. Most candidates managed to compare the three regions however a minority simply described the three data lines in isolation. The highest scoring candidates made good use of data from the graph. However, a surprisingly large number did not use the y-axis effectively omitting to transfer the (£000) from the graph to their answers. This impacted their mark.

(ii) Many managed to identify two results of the changes in house prices, however only a minority managed to develop both for the full four marks as their development points were similar. Those that did gain the full four marks did so by referring to both a positive and negative consequence.

(b) This question showed that candidates were able to identify the impacts of decline in central urban areas on people – however the examination, whilst evident in the strongest candidate responses, was generally not well done. Where the examination was good candidates often referred to positive and negative effects. Some candidates referred to social or economic impacts, which was also a valid route. An additional route to scoring the AO2 marks was referring to the severity of the impact. There was a broad interpretation of what was meant by 'central urban areas'. 2.1.5 in the specification refers to urban change with a focus on central areas. Many of the best answers based their answers in this part of the city – however other approaches were also valid. The better answers made appropriate use of located case studies.

Q.2 **(a)** **(i)** Most candidates scored well here picking out the main points from the graph and making appropriate use of the data. General trends were noted as well as extremities and anomalies such as the 0-4 age group or the 85-89 age group. Where candidates did not score well it was generally due to a misinterpretation of the graph e.g. adding the percentages for different age groups. Some candidates noted that there was a 78% increase in over 65-year-olds.

(ii) Many managed to identify a consequence. The most popular answer was the pressure on services – the NHS in particular. However, for the development point, only a minority noted how that would impact the area.

(b) This item saw a wide variety of answers. The strongest responses located their knowledge and understanding effectively e.g. focused on rural regeneration in Eryri, Pembrokeshire or Ludlow. The better answers focused directly on local groups and noted how they had stimulated regeneration. High scoring answers often went on to consider the role organisations like local and national governments play (AO2). However, many responses were generalised with candidates attempting to answer the question without referring to any located examples. This meant that the specific knowledge on local groups required for AO1 was not well developed.

Section B: Fieldwork Investigations in Physical and Human Geography

Q.3 **(a)** **(i)** Most candidates managed to identify strengths and limitations of the data presentation method. However, there was a tendency to drift into noting the strengths and limitations of the data itself rather than how it was presented. This approach was not creditworthy. The candidates that scored well for AO2 were able to give an over-arching opinion of whether there were more strengths than limitations to the method.

(ii) The most popular answer was a bar graph. However, a surprisingly large number of candidates suggested a line graph. Candidates should be aware of the difference between discrete and continuous data as they prepare to present data in their individual investigations.

(iii) Where the candidates had noted a suitable method, they were more often than not able to justify their choice effectively.

(iv) The most popular response was questionnaires. However, the follow up aspect of the question was not well answered. After some initial outlining of the method candidates fell into the trap of justifying their choice. Better answers here referred to size of sample or target populations and included some suggestions of what type of questions to use. Some very well-developed responses were seen here.

Q.4 There is no escaping the fact this was not well answered by the majority. The mean mark was 3.2/9. Several candidates scored zero as they did had no understanding of sampling and could not name a method. In some cases, candidates thought that data collection tools such as an anemometer or a quadrat were a sampling method. Slightly better answers noted how sampling was used in their fieldwork, but their answers lacked confidence and clarity. However, some did scored well. Coastal studies such as beach profiling/ rock samples and succession studies were popular amongst the highest scoring answers. Many candidates were confident in describing their sampling strategies and were able to refer confidently to more than one strategy. With the AO2, even amongst the better candidates there was a tendency to evaluate the strategies rather than justify them. However, many scored highly by referring to eradicating bias/ saving time and ensuring the reliability of their data.

The best answers had clear understanding of the sampling strategies used and why they were the most suitable. **We would urge centres to focus on developing knowledge and understanding of sampling methods at AS level. This understanding is crucial to their independent investigation** and is a point of improvement highlighted annually in the Principal Moderator's Report (see section 5 of this report).

Q.5 Most candidates managed to identify two findings and suggested ways these could lead to further research. The mean mark was 3.8/9. The higher scoring answers supported findings with data. Better answers also used findings directly related to the title noted at the top of the page. Better answers also ensured that there was a clear distinction between the two 'findings' allowing them to access the highest AO1. When it came to further developing their work candidates that scored well managed to suggest areas for development for their initial study, e.g. looking at unexpected findings. Whilst these were the characteristics of the better answers, they were not the characteristics of the majority. Many of the responses noted a finding but did not support it with enough data. Suggestions for improvement tended to be generic e.g. with urban studies 'we could come back on the weekend', or with studies that involved questionnaires 'we could ask more people'. Many did not move beyond basic GCSE level comments. A significant minority suggested that they could develop their work by suggesting reasons for the finding previously noted. Explaining a finding does not result in further research opportunities.

A LEVEL GEOGRAPHY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 3: GLOBAL SYSTEMS AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Overview of the Unit

This unit continues to place significant demands on candidates. Inherent within this unit is the demand to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills from a wide breadth of specification content as well as to produce three pieces of extended writing, one of which requires candidates to analyse several resources and produce a coherent argument to a challenging synoptic-style question.

- This paper proved to be accessible to most candidates with almost no rubric errors. There were, however, a number of questions which resulted in poor outcomes from candidates across the ability range:
  - Question 2 (a) (ii) very few candidates were able to complete the percentage change question accurately; even fewer to recognise that the change was negative.
  - Question 5 (b) few candidates were able to articulate political strategies leading to creation of global hubs.
  - Question 6 (b) many candidates were unable to articulate knowledge of an international strategy to manage flows of people trafficking.
- In the extended writing options, there was more parity between numbers of candidates answering each question than has been seen in previous sessions. This was pleasing to see and demonstrates candidate's effective engagement across the specification as a whole.
  - In Section A, question 3 (seasonal changes in drainage basin stores) was slightly more popular than question 4 (peatland management strategies).
  - In Section B, question 7 (consequences of rural-urban migration) was more popular than question 8 (consequences of over-exploitation of marine environments)
  - In Section C, question 9 was more popular than question 10.
- There were significant numbers of candidates who left out one or more of the shorter questions; many of these had produced good pieces of extended writing, but those short AO1 questions (2b; 5b and 6b) eluded them. Candidates are to be reminded that any element of the specification can be examined and advised to use the wording of the specification to help structure revision, as questions are drawn directly from the specification. This was a trend that emerged in 2024 and seems to have continued, despite mention in last year's examiners' report.
- The paper differentiated very effectively with substantial numbers of candidates displaying both an impressive level of knowledge and conceptual understanding (AO1) combined with sophisticated skills of analysis, evaluation and synthesis (AO2).
- The 21st Century Challenges section continues to be an area of strength for many candidates; candidates are to be commended for this at the end of a long and mentally demanding paper.
- Two areas of concern have been highlighted by the examining team; firstly that there are a significant number of candidates for whom their handwriting is illegible and secondly that a number of very short answers were produced in response to the 18- and 26-mark questions.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Overview of the Unit

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Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Global Systems

Q.1 **(a)** Performance on this question was somewhat polarised; where candidates were familiar with the concept of drainage basin flows, they were typically able to access all four marks. Candidates are to be encouraged to prioritise learning core vocabulary so that they can access all questions and the associated marks.

(b) This question required candidates to link their knowledge of different types of hydrograph to the type of precipitation that determines its shape. Where candidates were confidently able to connect these two pieces of understanding, they scored good marks. As with the previous question, there were a number of candidates whose answer suggested that they were unfamiliar with either one or both ideas being examined. In some cases this was due to a confusion between a river regime graph and a hydrograph.

Q.2 **(a)(i)(ii)** These two questions tested simple mathematical skills by requiring candidates to select information from the resource. Whilst the vast majority were able to complete the simple subtraction, it was of concern how many were unable to either extract the correct data for the percentage change, and accurately calculate the change, recognising that the carbon store had decreased in size. There were clearly some candidates who had not brought a calculator into the exam; centres are advised to remind candidates of the need to be properly equipped and fully prepared for skills-style (AO3) questions.

(b) This question required candidates to recognise the process of methane feedback within the carbon cycle. Where candidates were familiar with the characteristics and location of methane stores, they answered the question with apparent ease. Many candidates rereferred to methane as if it were the same as carbon dioxide and this precluded them from accessing marks. Attention to detail during revision is again to be encouraged.

Q.3 This question demanded knowledge and understanding of different stores within the drainage basin system. The mean mark was 8.5/18. It was pleasing to note that some candidates were very well prepared with discussions about varying impacts of seasonal precipitation patterns on vegetation, soil and groundwater stores. These answers were especially strong where they could make locational connections between e.g. mountain drainage basins (R. Colorado), UK drainage basins and / or monsoon-fed drainage basins in the Indian subcontinent. Weaker candidates either referred to little more than surface stores or assumed that drainage basins per se changed in size according to volumes of precipitations. Use of appropriate, well-used case studies was a notable strength of some answers and generated an obvious route to assessing the impact of seasonal changes.

Q.4 Some candidates produced exceptional answers to this question requiring knowledge, understanding and assessment of peatland management strategies. The mean mark was 9.2/18. Many candidates were familiar with significant detail about a range of methods being deployed in a range of places. Such candidates made good use of integrating specialised concepts of risk, resilience, sustainability and thresholds to support their assessment as well as ideas related to short-and long-term success. It was surprising to note how few candidates used strategies deployed in Wales to support their answer (although there are no marks for use of Welsh examples *per se*); weaker candidates struggled not only with strategy detail but also to engage with the command to assess.

Section B: Global Governance

Q.5 **(a)** Most candidates produced very good answers to this question, easily picking up from the resource that the numbers of refugees in Turkey and Lebanon posed significant issues to local communities, the burden was greater in Lebanon than Turkey owing both to the size of the country and existing refugee populations. Weaker candidates could get no further than comments relating to house purchases and taking jobs; further demonstrating lack of engagement with revision / exam preparation.

(b) This question was one of the poorest performing questions on the paper. Candidates seemed unfamiliar with a number of elements required by the question: namely, political strategies leading to global hubs and the notion that these would be hubs for migration and / or investment. Weaker candidates assumed 'China' to be a global hub, unable to locate a city that might represent a global hub, meanwhile many candidates referred to the Schengen Agreement as if the UK had been a part of it and furthermore, not specifying any named European city that might be considered a global hub.

Q.6 **(a)** All candidates engaged well with this question which required them to analyse the map to interpret the significance of the Strait of Malacca. Candidates were able to identify spatial patterns, volume and flow and support their interpretation with data from the resource. Successive years of training candidates for this style of question has paid off.

(b) Along with **Q.5 (b)**, this question did not perform well, and scores were polarised between those who had secure knowledge of people trafficking strategies and those who could engage no further than to mention tightening of border controls. A further nudge to future candidates to be familiar with wording on the specification in order to identify knowledge required in this style of question.

Q.7 This question was answered by more than half of the candidates who were well-prepared on this area of the specification. The mean mark was 9.0/18. Better candidates were able to draw on more than one case study in order to examine the consequence of rural-urban migration. The question itself enabled candidates to approach the examination requirement by weighing up consequences on rural areas as opposed to urban areas; strongest candidates contrasted impacts across both place and time. Candidates who have been taught about rural-urban migration in China, India or African nations in preparation for Unit 4, are advised to ensure that they focus on the wording of the question to avoid drift into irrelevant detail: much was read of the hukou system without any evaluation of its consequences on either rural or urban areas.

Q.8 This question enabled candidates to discuss a wide range of consequences of over-exploitation of marine environments. The mean mark was 9.7/18 making it the most successfully answered essay on the paper. Most candidates included issues of over-fishing and damage to marine environments. Weaker candidates were unable to acknowledge causes of said-over-exploitation (e.g. of the Great Barrier Reef) and this led to confusion as to the nature of the over-exploitation – either social, economic or environmental. Similarly, candidates were keen to identify the issues related to fossil fuel exploration, without a grasp of the nature of the associated consequences, thereby unable to access either AO1 and / or AO2 marks.

Section C: 21st Century Challenges

Resources: the resource to stimulate content for the answers in this section of the paper, proved eminently accessible to all candidates. There was evidence that some had not read the detail contained in the resources' title and therefore some confusion as to whether Dharavi (Figure 5) was a rural or an urban area. Furthermore, it appeared that some candidates did not turn the page (as per instructions at the base of the page) and therefore did not see the two resources relating to redevelopment of Cardiff Bay.

Q.9 This was the more popular of the two questions; many candidates perceiving it as more accessible. The mean mark was 14.9/26. The best candidates fully engaged with the idea of 'physical processes' beyond those associated with tectonic events and fully appreciated that the context of this year's 21st Century Challenges was urban. Stronger candidates not only engaged with resources in a paragraph-by-paragraph approach, but they also used the resources to compare and contrast between the locations featured in the photographs. Almost all candidates included a conclusion and structure of this piece of extended writing was generally very good. Candidates are advised to include a mini conclusion at the end of each paragraph and to avoid repetition thereof in their final conclusion.

Q.10 Some candidates produced some very good answers to this question's focus on inequality, with reference to urban places. The mean mark was 14.0/26. Candidates typically stuck to the locations featured in the photos and were able to synthesise their analysis of the photos to support their argument. In the answers to this question, the AO1 element was typically less strong than AO2 and candidates are to be reminded of the need to showcase their own knowledge and understanding from across the specification in support of their evolving arguments. As per comments relating to question 9, the structure was similarly strong and advice regarding conclusions is the same.

This section produced some very high-scoring answers, and candidates are clearly better and better prepared each year for the demands of this section of the examination. Centres are to be thanked for their meticulous preparation of their candidates for this section in which almost all candidates demonstrate their ability to 'think like a geographer'.

GEOGRAPHY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 4: CONTEMPORARY THEMES IN GEOGRAPHY

Overview of the Unit

- Entries for U4 remain stable, at 1,034 in 2025, down slightly from 1,039 in 2024. It is worth noting that the responses to the India and China essays have shown significant improvement in recent years, as highlighted by the mean marks attained this year. The highest-performing essay on the paper was Question 7 (China), which achieved an average mark of 14.7/22 (67%). Question 5 (India) achieved an average mark of 14.3/22 (65%). Question 13 (Weather and Climate) was the worst performing, with an average mark of 10.1/22 (46%). In terms of the Section B themes, Energy is the most popular theme, with 505 essays seen, attaining an average mark of 13.4/22 (61%). The least popular Section B theme is India, with just 103 essays seen.
- Unit 4 assesses students' ability to demonstrate their critical knowledge and understanding of various physical and human themes: Tectonics, Ecosystems, India and China, Sub-Saharan Africa, Energy, and Weather and Climate. Candidates are encouraged to write analytically and come to logical, reasoned conclusions. Unit 4 assesses all assessment objectives (A01, A02 and A03). A01 makes up 30% of the marks on the Section A Tectonics essays. A02 is worth 65% of the marks in Section A, and A03, 5%. In Section B, A01 is worth 41%, A02 50%, and A03 9%. A01 marks are awarded for the knowledge and understanding of places, environments, concepts, processes, interactions and change at various scales. A02 assesses the ability to apply knowledge and understanding in different contexts to analyse, interpret, or evaluate geographical issues and information, including the relevant application of specialised concepts. A03 assesses the ability to apply various geographical skills to construct arguments and communicate findings.
- The effective use of case studies is an ongoing concern. In tectonics, many archaic examples continue to be used, with candidates referring generically to events such as Krakatoa, Pompeii, and Mount Tambora. The lack of case studies in the Ecosystems theme was also an issue, as many candidates were unable to name a local scale ecosystem or could not provide depth and detail when discussing the relative influence of precipitation on the structure and functioning of ecosystems. Some examiners expressed concern about the stereotypical views of India and China that some candidates presented. There was a lack of focus on the questions set at times. For example, many responses to question 4 drifted from the local scale and focused on biomes. Several responses to question 14 failed to concentrate on high-pressure systems and drifted into a comparison of the impacts of high-pressure and low-pressure hazards. Following the specification update in June 2024, it was pleasing to see a variety of new case studies in response to the Development in an African Context theme. References were frequently made to Egypt and Morocco.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A Theme 1: Tectonic Hazards

Q.1 Question 1 was the most popular option in Section A, with 62% of candidates selecting it. The best candidates demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding of the primary and secondary hazards associated with volcanic activity. Better responses examined the impacts of ash falls in comparison to other hazards, with many applying the specialised concepts of place and scale to explore the relative effect of ash locally, regionally, globally, and in the short and long term. Most commonly, evidence included references to Eyjafjallajökull (E15), Mount St. Helens, Nevado Del Ruiz and Mount Ontake.

Here is an extract from an excellent response: "Volcanoes provide a great natural hazard to people and the environment around them. These hazards include lava flow, lahars, landslides, pyroclastic flows, ash fall, and tephra, all hazardous in different ways. I will assess whether I think one is more serious than another, especially if ash falls are the most significant hazard. By doing this, I am covering the specialised concepts of sustainability, place, causality and mitigation." Weaker responses tended to be descriptive with generic support, which restricted the application of A02: "Lava bombs are also another hazard that is dangerous, but this time it is not as serious as it affects the immediate vicinity of the volcano and nothing else."

Q.2 Question 2 was the least popular option in Section A (38% of candidates selected this option), and it also received a lower mean mark of 12.1/20, in comparison to the 12.9/20 attained by candidates on question 1. Commonly cited case studies included the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, and the 2023 Turkey-Syria earthquakes. Successful responses identified and described short-term and long-term responses to the effects of earthquakes and then proceeded to evaluate them. Here is an extract from an excellent response: "The effects of earthquakes can be managed by short-term responses, which occur immediately after a disaster and long-term responses, which consist of recovery, mitigation (SC) and preparedness to build a country's resilience (SC) ... Turkey and Syria also have a lower level of education and suffer from lower hazard perception, reducing their ability to mitigate (SC) hazards." Weaker responses provided a purely descriptive account of measures with little to no supporting evidence. Such responses often lacked clarity regarding what constituted short-term and long-term strategies, with several candidates veering off into an evaluation of methods to deal with the effects of volcanic activity.

Section B: Theme 2: Ecosystems

Q.3 The most cited ecosystems were the tropical rainforest, the desert and the Arctic tundra. Better responses were able to evaluate the relative importance of precipitation on the structure and functioning of different ecosystems, by considering a range of additional abiotic and biotic factors. Such answers also provided specific examples and information on average temperatures, NPP, and precipitation levels. It was pleasing to see the inclusion of Gersmehl diagrams in many responses, which effectively supported and supplemented the arguments presented. Weaker responses lacked the depth and detail required to tackle the A02 component successfully, with comments like: "Precipitation is very important in the tropical rainforest."

Q.4 Candidates addressed this question poorly (attaining an average of 10.6/22 in comparison to 13/22 for question 3), as either their knowledge and understanding of succession were generally weak, with candidates discussing the topic in generic terms, or they misinterpreted the question, for example, examining the impacts of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest or the threats to coral reef ecosystems. The specification states that students should study succession in one ecosystem, the arresting role of physical factors in creating sub-climax communities, and the role of human factors in maintaining plagioclimax communities. Local ecosystems may encompass deciduous woodland, sand dunes and wetland areas. Better candidates were able to discuss the impact of human activities on succession in sand dunes such as Broomhill Burrows, Merthyr Mawr, and Newton Burrows. By doing so, the specialised concepts of mitigation, place, risk, sustainability and vulnerability were applied and discussed.

Theme 3: Economic Growth and Challenge - India or China

Q.5 and Q.7 Candidates presented a variety of political and physical factors influencing economic development in both India and China. For instance, many spoke of the impact of colonialism in India, the role of the IMF and SEZs. In terms of the physical factors, candidates highlighted that the Deccan Plateau region is rich in mineral deposits, such as iron ore, coal, and mica, and many referred to the role of the Ganga River system in promoting agriculture. For China, the role of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) was often highlighted, alongside the roles of FDI, SEZs, and TVEs. Candidates also highlighted the role of China's physical geography, which influences the location of economic activities; for example, agriculture is predominantly located in the eastern part of the country. Case study support was variable, and in many instances, it was generic: "Physical factors of China have also significantly influenced China's economic development. China's coastline, which runs along the south of China, has been crucial as it allowed China easy access to global trade via the sea."

The A02 discussion component was often lacking or undeveloped, with opportunities to integrate the specialised concepts neglected: "The Chinese Communist Party has played a crucial role in influencing economic growth ... the Chinese government created special economic zones which were areas with reduced taxes and restrictions, which attracted investment from MNCs." In this example, the candidate could have discussed the specialised concepts of causality, globalisation, interdependence, place, and the temporal scale.

Q.6 and Q.8 Candidates were able to identify the threats resulting from urbanisation. In India, they were quick to recognise the problems associated with the growth of slums like Dharavi in Mumbai, and in China, the development of cities like Shenzhen. Additional threats, including deforestation, industrial pollution, soil erosion, and water security issues, were highlighted by many; however, the quality of case study support varied, as detailed A01 was lacking: "Also, a lack of emissions laws means that car emissions are unregulated. This means that a large amount of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and methane are all emitted into the atmosphere." The consensus was that the A02 element of the responses to questions 6 and 8 was often not developed fully. Candidates presented arguments about the extent to which the most significant environmental threats in India and China resulted from urbanisation. However, they lacked sophistication and the application of relevant specialised concepts: "As a result of this industry, the Ganga is being polluted. For example, tanneries for leather often leak chemicals such as arsenic into the sacred River Ganga, leading to significant environmental impacts." In this example, the candidate could have discussed specialised concepts such as place, risk, sustainability, and vulnerability.

Theme 3: Development in Africa

Q.9 The responses to this question were imbalanced, as candidates often demonstrated a firm knowledge and understanding of both single and composite quantitative indicators of development; however, their knowledge and understanding of qualitative indicators of development lacked clarity and precision: "Another quantitative measurement is HDI. Botswana's HDI is around 0.7 (global average is 0.74), which was moderate to high on this index. However, 20% of people suffer from HIV/AIDS, so this index is not accurate and lacks validity as it fails to consider health factors. Therefore, to a small extent, I agree with the statement ... Qualitative measures of development are also effective to an extent. The happiness and freedom of a country are measured on an index. Nigeria scored low on this." Furthermore, candidates did not embrace opportunities to include specialised concepts such as inequality, interdependence, place, scale, and temporal scale.

Q.10 As alluded to during the overview of the unit at the start of this report, it was pleasing to see the inclusion of new examples this year, following the removal of the focus on Sub-Saharan African nations. Many responses highlighted the role of ecotourism in Rwanda, as well as tourism in Egypt, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania. Better candidates could examine the relative importance of tourism in relation to several additional factors, such as economics, cultural and social variables, physical geography, and politics. These responses effectively highlighted the importance of tourism, and employed specialised concepts during the examination of their significance: "Overall, it seems natural resources such as oil have an overall negative impact on development, especially in countries with high risk (SC) and vulnerability (SC) to corrupt governments and organisations, showing the interdependence (SC) of economic and political factors ... in conclusion, it seems tourism is generally not the most important factor influencing development."

Theme 4: Energy Challenges and Dilemmas

Q.11 Answers to question 11 tended to be overly descriptive and lacked focus on the statement 'Fossil fuels and alternative energy sources are both vital for a sustainable future.' Many candidates proceeded to evaluate the sustainability of fossil fuels and alternative forms of energy, with varying degrees of support from case studies, and a significant amount of generic material was observed: "Fossil fuels are not primarily associated with the need for a sustainable future as extracting, storing and transporting fossil fuels have a negative impact on the environment. Whereas alternative energy sources such as solar, wind and hydroelectricity do not emit any carbon dioxide or any greenhouse gases, they are extremely vital in working towards a sustainable future." Better candidates were able to examine the relative advantages and limitations of both energy sources before coming to a reasoned conclusion about the best way forward, often introducing specialised concepts of causality, inequality, interdependence, place, risk, and sustainability.

Q.12 Candidates knew and understood the factors that influence energy mixes at a national scale, with many candidates identifying economic, physical and political variables. However, a lack of detailed support and discussion prevented many from reaching Band 3 for A01 and A02. Here is an example: " ... another factor is location. Countries which are landlocked have a smaller energy mix as they are limited to the energy sources they can use, as they cannot use tidal or wave energy." Better responses were able to incorporate named examples, with supporting evidence, which resulted in additional credit. Such responses generally centred around discussions surrounding the use of nuclear power in France, geothermal power in Iceland, and micro-hydro schemes in Nepal. The use of detailed case study evidence enabled candidates to evaluate the relative importance of the economic, physical, and political factors identified and incorporate specialised concepts such as causality, inequality, interdependence, place, scale, sustainability, and vulnerability into their responses.

Theme 5: Weather and Climate

Q.13 Only 77 candidates attempted this question (7.5% of the cohort), and the mean mark was the lowest of any essay on Unit 4, at 10.1/22. Overall, knowledge and understanding of the ITCZ were limited, with candidates unable to discuss how the ITCZ influences the characteristics of tropical climates. In addition, the understanding of other factors that influence the characteristics of tropical climates was marginal or absent, which limited the number of marks that could be awarded for A01 and A02, as candidates could not discuss the relative influence of the different factors that affect the characteristics of tropical climates in a robust manner.

Q.14 Many candidates opted to discuss the demographic, economic, environmental, social and temporal impacts of high-pressure systems, alongside references to the specialised concepts of place, risk, sustainability and vulnerability. Case studies included drought in Burkina Faso, the 1976 UK heatwave, and the European heatwaves of 2003, 2006, and 2022, as well as wildfires in Australia and the United States. Weaker answers drifted into a comparison of the impacts of hazards associated with high-pressure systems and those related to low-pressure systems.

A LEVEL GEOGRAPHY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 5: INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

Overview of the Unit

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 the mean mark dropping by only 0.3 marks overall.

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 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@wjec.co.uk
Qualification webpage: https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/geography-asa-level

See other useful contacts here: Useful Contacts | WJEC

CPD Training / Professional Learning

Access our popular, free online CPD/PL courses to receive exam feedback and put questions to our subject team, and attend one of our face-to-face events, focused on enhancing teaching and learning, providing practical classroom ideas and developing understanding of marking and assessment.

Please find details for all our courses here: https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/

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