GCSE Examiners' Report (Legacy)

Geography

GCSE (Legacy)

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 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.***

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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.
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 | WJEC

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Contents

	Page
Executive summary	5
Unit 1: Changing Physical and Human Landscapes	6
Unit 2: Environmental and Development Issues	8
Unit 3: Fieldwork Enquiry	10
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	13

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Executive Summary

The examination papers in legacy WJEC GCSE Geography were generally of a similar standard to the previous examination series. As is always the case, some questions were seen as more demanding in some topics and less demanding in others. The 8-mark answers in Units 1 and 2 proved to be good differentiators in performance, as did the Unit 3 fieldwork questions where candidates who specifically referred to their own fieldwork scored the highest marks.

This is the final year of the legacy specification and as such it is not relevant to include a long list of positives and negatives of all the papers here. Instead, it is of more value to outline some points from each of the Unit papers that can be taken forward to the new QFF specification.

From Unit 1, there are three main points to take forward into the new QFF Unit 1 and 3 papers. Candidates will still be asked questions where they will need to describe patterns and use figures from resources, for example OS maps and other graphs and images. This is still a weakness amongst many candidates, who fail to use resources and stimulus material correctly when presented with them in an exam paper. High tariff questions often require the use of resources, this will be the same in the new QFF papers, and candidates must be prepared to both use resources given and follow the correct command words in the questions (e.g. ‘to what extent’, ‘evaluate’, ‘how far do you agree?’) in order to access the highest bands and marks. Linking the question to the correct AO will also be vital in the new QFF papers and is an identified weakness here.

Issues from Unit 2 to take forward to the legacy spec include the understanding of key command words in the questions, e.g. when asked to evaluate, candidates must always look at both sides of any argument or statement in depth. As outlined above, this will be vital when answering questions on the QFF papers. Use of correct Geographical terminology is, and will continue to be, key when answering all types of questions, either key terms related to a particular topic or the use of compass directions instead of ‘above’ or ‘below’ when describing locations of places on maps for example. Close attention will still be needed to the Appendix of the required mathematical, statistical and graphical techniques in the QFF specification; the optional questions from Unit 2 legacy paper this year that required interpretation of cumulative/multiple line graphs were particularly poorly answered, despite being clearly in the legacy (and new QFF) Appendix as a type of graph to cover and understand.

Although the new Unit 2 QFF fieldwork NEA is very different from the legacy Unit 3 fieldwork NEA, the key takeaways from legacy Unit 3 this year are largely still relevant. Candidates must be able to justify why they have chosen a particular graphical or statistical technique and how it contributes to their investigation and not simply describe it and what it shows. Generic statements should be avoided when analysing data and making conclusions and the candidates’ own data collection and enquiry questions should always be referred to when making key points in the written work. Evaluations must be detailed and balanced and must always consider problems with data collection, issues with validity of results, potential improvements to make if the study were to be repeated and future geographical questions identified that could be investigated with the knowledge gained from the final fieldwork report.

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GEOGRAPHY

GCSE (Legacy)

Summer 2026

UNIT 1: OUR PHYSICAL AND HUMAN WORLD

Overview of the Unit

The general performance of candidates in this paper suggests that it was of an appropriate standard and a fair test in which the full range of candidates overall were able to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do. All questions were attempted by most candidates (most questions had an over 95% attempt rate) indicating the phrasing and language used in the questions, together with the time allowance given, were accessible and appropriate. Differentiation was achieved through a balance of short (five questions were multiple choice questions for example) and more challenging, extended questions. It was pleasing to see that most items in Question 1 and 2 had attempt rates of more than 92% with only 1aiv and 2bi falling below this. Overall, the mean mark for the Unit 1 paper was 39.9, which was higher than the mean of 37.6 for 2025. As in most years of this specification, candidates tended overall to perform better in Question 1. This was mainly due to the disappointing response to items relating to the concepts of Egan's Wheel, counter urbanisation, commuting and sphere of influence in Theme 2.

As in every previous year of this specification, the questions are driven by the assessment objectives with each item assessing a single objective. The balance of marks in each theme accorded to each assessment objective is pre-set to a consistent formula in each series. Hover, the actual question structure is not consistent year on year, and it is worth noting that this year that the only questions with an 8 mark tariff were 3bii and 4bii.

One area which proved challenging for candidates was the description of a pattern using map evidence. This challenge was seen in both such questions on the paper. In Theme 1, where description of the pattern of sand deposition along the stretch of coastline was required, namely in question 1aiii, it was obvious that candidates struggled. There were some excellent responses here, but several candidates found the description difficult and found the use of map evidence to exemplify very challenging. The same could be said for the pattern question in Theme 2, question 2aiv, where candidates struggled to draw out patterns from the map to describe the relationship between patterns of commuting and settlement size.

Another area candidates found challenging were the concepts of commuting, counter urbanisation and spheres of influence and the concept of Egan's Wheel (questions all within Theme 2, namely 2aiv, 2av, 2avi and 2bi). As outlined in the specification, candidates are expected to understand contemporary challenges facing UK towns and cities as part of their studies. Additionally, within the specification it notes that candidates should understand patterns of commuting and issues that arise from counter urbanisation in Wales or between Wales and England, as well as impacts of urban spheres of influence and technological change on service provision in rural areas. The attempt rates for these questions were between 91% and 95% which may show a lack of understanding from candidates with regards to their disciplinary literacy or a lack of knowledge on these concepts.

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A third area that candidates found challenging were the 8 mark questions in themes 3 and 4, both worth 8 marks, 3bii and 4bii. Candidates were given a statement and then asked 'To what extent did they agree' with said statement. Candidates found it challenging to note points on both sides of the argument to justify their given route of response. This resulted in the mean mark for this question being 4.0 for 3bii and 3.7 for 4bii.

There was approximately 70:30 split in favour of Theme 3 in response to the optional themes in the English medium paper, with this rising closer to 80:20 in the Welsh medium papers. This is like 2025 and follows the pattern of previous series where theme 3 has been by far the most popular choice of option on this paper. The mean overall marks for both Question 3 and 4 were 6.7, suggesting no difference in the accessibility of each, despite the much larger numbers completing Question 3.

Summary of key points:

1. Pattern questions requiring the use of using map evidence remain challenging for candidates, for example in question 1aiii in Theme 1 and 2aiv in Theme 2.

2. Candidates found some specific concepts difficult to understand, for example Egan's Wheel and counter urbanisation.

3. Candidates find the highest tariff questions more challenging, particularly when responding from the 'To what extent do you agree' element. There were challenges in being able to look at both sides of the argument in both Theme 3 and 4 with this question.

4. Attention should be paid to the AO the question is assessing to ensure candidates answer the question correctly. In some AO2 questions, such as 1cii, 3bii and 4bii, candidates either relied very heavily on the resources or failed to take the resource much further which resulted in lower mean marks. Many candidates didn't use the resources within their response at all.

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GEOGRAPHY

GCSE (Legacy)

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UNIT 2: ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Overview of the Unit

Candidates' overall performance in this paper illustrates that there was an equal balance of support and challenge, which indicates it was at the appropriate standard.

The phrasing and language used in the questions was consistent with previous years, and all questions were attempted by most candidates. The balance of short and extended writing questions across the paper enabled differentiation to be effectively achieved for all candidates. The questions provided plenty of opportunity for candidates to illustrate their geographical knowledge and understanding together with the opportunity to demonstrate their geographical and mathematical skills.

There was a relatively even split of candidates completing the option questions (approximately 55% of candidates attempting Q3 compared to 45% attempting Q4) As required by the specification, all four assessment objectives (AOs) were examined across the paper with each part question assessing a single objective.

Some areas where candidates particularly struggled this year include:

Q.2aii where candidates were asked to describe the pattern of global water footprints shown on the map. They were directed to use map evidence only, but many candidates referred to their wider geographical knowledge e.g. referencing countries that were not named on the map. Also, this question showed the lack of geographical terms used by candidates to accurately describe a pattern e.g. rather than saying 'north of the equator' most candidates wrote 'above the equator'.

Q.2c where candidates were asked to evaluate the role of long-term aid in improving development in LICs and/or NICs. Most candidates gave the positives of long-term aid, but very few gave any negatives of the projects they described and therefore could not access band 3 marks. For evaluation questions they must address both sides of the argument.

Q.3ai and Q.4ai where candidates were asked to read from a cumulative graph. Most candidates did not know how to read a cumulative line graph and therefore gave inaccurate answers. Of those that did, some missed out the units (thousands or millions) from their answer and therefore it was incorrect.

Summary of Key Points

1. Candidates need to study and be familiar with a variety of graphs to represent data. It was clear from this year's paper that cumulative line graphs were unfamiliar to many candidates, and they did not know what was required to accurately read the graphs.

2. Evaluate questions must consider both sides of the argument. This does not need to be balanced, but there does need to be some consideration to the opposite side to what the candidate thinks. These questions might have 'evaluate' as their command word or a statement could be given and candidates are asked 'to what extent is this true'. Both these types of questions require evaluation.

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3. Candidates are expected to use geographical terminology in all questions across the paper but especially when describing the pattern, distribution or location of something on a map. Words such as above, below, close to etc should not be used and candidates should use geographical terminology such as the points of the compass in their descriptions.

4. Candidates must take careful note of the instructions within the question. If a question indicates that they must only use map evidence, then they need to refer to information that is only on the map and not bring in their wider knowledge. This is due to the AO that the question is examining. However, if the question indicates that they 'may' use map evidence then the candidate is referring to both map evidence and their own knowledge.

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GEOGRAPHY

GCSE (Legacy)

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UNIT 3 FIELDWORK NEA

Overview of the Unit

Overall, the paper was accessible to candidates across the full ability range, with over 97.5% of candidates attempting every question. The paper functioned well as a whole, allowing most candidates to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and fieldwork skills effectively. Key observations from this series included:

- Candidates would benefit from paying closer attention to the command words used in each question. Stronger responses demonstrated a clear understanding of what was being asked and made thoughtful use of portfolio evidence within the context of the question. Responses that were specific, analytical and supported by evidence were awarded higher bands, whereas more generic answers were often restricted to Band 1.
- Many candidates continue to make generic or descriptive comments about their fieldwork. To access the higher mark bands, candidates should make more direct use of evidence from their own investigations, referring explicitly to data collected and using it to support their judgements and conclusions.
- Most scripts were well organised and clearly presented. Most centres followed the guidance regarding the inclusion of additional sheets within candidates' portfolios. However, a small number of centres continue to submit excessive supporting material and, in some cases, entire portfolios. This is not required and does not assist the marking process.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Some areas where candidates particularly struggled this year include:

Q.1 (a) (ii) The mean mark of 1.6 suggests that many candidates found this question challenging. Most candidates were able to offer a basic explanation of the advantages of their chosen graph or mapping technique; however, responses were often generic and not linked to the specific data collected. Candidates frequently stated that a graph was "easy to read", "easy to understand" or "shows patterns clearly" without explaining why it was appropriate for their own dataset. To access the higher mark band, candidates needed to move beyond general descriptions and clearly relate the strengths of the selected graph or mapping technique to the characteristics of their own data.

Q.1 (b) The mean mark of 1.4 indicates that many candidates struggled to provide a specific evaluation of their sampling technique(s). Responses often described how the transect was carried out rather than evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the sampling method used. Many candidates identified a single advantage or disadvantage in general terms, such as the technique being "easy to use" or "quick to complete", without explaining how this affected the quality, reliability or representativeness of the data collected. Some responses focused solely on strengths or weaknesses and therefore lacked the evaluation required for higher marks.

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To achieve the higher bands, candidates needed to provide a specific evaluation, referring to both the advantages and limitations of the chosen sampling technique in the context of their own investigation. Evaluations need to include an explanation of how the sampling method affected the reliability, accuracy and representativeness of the data collected, demonstrating a clear understanding of its effectiveness in investigating patterns along the transect.

Q.2 (a) Candidates generally identified the data collection method(s) used, but many responses lacked sufficient explanation for why the method was appropriate for investigating inequality. Answers often focused on describing how the data was collected rather than explaining the rationale behind the choice of method. As a result, the mean mark was 1.6.

To achieve the higher mark bands, candidates need to provide specific reasons for selecting their chosen data collection method(s). Explanations need to include details of how the data collection method helped to collect reliable, accurate and relevant data, demonstrating a clear understanding of its suitability for investigating patterns of inequality.

Q.2 (b) Most candidates demonstrated an understanding of what secondary data is and were able to identify general strengths and weaknesses of secondary sources. Many responses also attempted to evaluate the usefulness of secondary data, however, responses often remained generic and lacked specific reference to the secondary data that had been used. This was reflected in the mean mark of 2.4. Candidates frequently referred to the strengths and weaknesses of online sources, census data, photographs or published reports, but these evaluations were not always linked effectively to their own investigation of inequality.

To achieve the higher bands, candidates needed to provide a specific and detailed evaluation of the secondary data used in their own investigation. Responses should explain how particular sources supported the investigation of inequality and consider factors such as reliability, accuracy, currency and coverage. The strongest responses (Band 3) used specific evidence from their investigation to assess the usefulness of the secondary data and evaluate its contribution to the conclusions reached.

Summary of key points

1. Responses need to explain why particular graphs, mapping techniques, sampling methods, data collection methods and sources of secondary data were chosen, and why they were appropriate for the enquiry and the specific data collected, rather than simply describing them.

2. Candidates need to apply their knowledge and understanding to their own investigation. Comments about methods, graphs or sources should be linked directly to the data collected, patterns investigated and conclusions reached, rather than relying on generic statements that could apply to any fieldwork enquiry.

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3. Responses should explain how and why a method, graph or source contributed to their own investigation, including how data collection methods produced reliable, accurate and relevant evidence, and how presentation techniques helped reveal geographical patterns within the datasets and their own investigation.

4. Balanced evaluation is required to access higher bands/marks. Responses should consider both strengths and limitations, moving beyond simple comments such as "quick" or "easy to use" to explain how advantages and disadvantages affected the quality of their own investigation and the conclusions drawn.

5. Candidates need to support points with evidence from their own enquiry. References to graphs, sampling methods and secondary data should be specific and demonstrate how these contributed to understanding the geographical issue being investigated.

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Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.
Tel: 02922 404 276
Email: GCSEGeography@wjec.co.uk
Qualification webpage: https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/geography-gcse/ -tab_keydocuments

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