

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

GEOGRAPHY

H481

For first teaching in 2016

H481/01 Autumn 2020 series

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.



Reports for the Autumn 2020 series will provide a broad commentary about candidate performance, with the aim for them to be useful future teaching tools. As an exception for this series they will not contain any questions from the question paper nor examples of candidate answers.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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Paper 1 series overview

Encouragingly, it is clear that candidates are increasingly familiar with the structure of this paper and the optionality within it. The majority of candidates were able to answer all the required questions and use their time accordingly. Whilst many completed the questions in numerical order, a small number of candidates opted to write their 16-mark essays first in order to suit their own exam technique.

As has been seen in previous years, the most popular option was Coastal Landscapes, however, Glaciated Landscapes was also answered by a large proportion of the candidates.

It was apparent that candidates were aware of the assessment objectives, particularly in the longer essay questions, where they understood the need to analyse and evaluate to form a coherent argument. Whilst the use of case studies and examples were apparent in the vast majority of candidate answers, at times candidates would benefit from integrating these clearly into their argument and making links back to the question to ensure they are relevant and utilised correctly. Aside from this, it was pleasing to see that many answers were well-structured and that candidates were more versed in considering the importance of time and scale when analysing.

The answers to the skills-based questions were variable in quality, and it was clear that a number of candidates would benefit further from practice in this area – particularly in the relevant statistical techniques. The vast majority of candidates also considered very simplistic advantages of data presentation techniques and again further teaching regarding specific advantages to a range of techniques would be beneficial.

	OCR support	<p>We have produced a Geographical skills teacher guide, student workbook and PowerPoint teaching materials. This teacher guide has been written to support you in delivering a wide range of geographical skills listed in the specification. The PowerPoints which have been produced alongside this guide, mean that you can use these as teaching materials in lessons with your students. There are lots of student activities included in the student workbook so they can practice the geographical skills'. The student's workbook and the PPTs can be found within the 'Teacher Guides' tab.</p> <p>https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-and-a-level/geography-h081-h481-from-2016/planning-and-teaching/</p>
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While it is recognised that candidates are under time pressure, there are still times when handwriting is a concern and is becoming illegible; candidates must remember there is a risk that this work may not be credited if this is the case.

<i>Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:</i>	<i>Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:</i>
<p>Integrated their case studies into their answers and ensure appropriate links were made to the question</p> <p>Formed comprehensive arguments with well-developed ideas, whilst also ensuring they picked up on the nuances of the question</p> <p>Demonstrated an understanding of data presentation and analysis techniques and applied these to the situations presented.</p>	<p>Listed their knowledge of their case studies without applying these to the question</p> <p>Focused on breadth of knowledge without offering any depth to the points they had made</p> <p>Unsuccessfully applied their skills practice to new scenarios including the identification of landforms, measuring distances, and most commonly the use of statistical analysis.</p>

Section overview

Section A:

Optionality is present in Section A with candidates having a choice of three options. Both Coastal and Glaciated Landscapes were popular options, with no candidates choosing to answer Dryland Landscapes. No candidates made a rubric error, showing increasing familiarity with the structure of the paper.

Section B:

All candidates must answer questions in this section on Earth's Life Support Systems. Within this section, Geographical skills were assessed along with the ability of candidates to apply knowledge and understanding to form coherent and well-structured arguments.

Option overview – Section A

Coastal Landscapes continued to be a popular choice and some candidates were able to write in a high level of detail about this topic. It was clear that candidates had learned relevant case studies such as the Nile Delta, however, a number of candidates found it difficult to link this to the question.

Glaciated Landscapes was also popular during this series and whilst some candidates demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding of this topic, it appeared that for others this was a challenging section. In particular many candidates could only write in limited detail about the formation and modification of the landforms they had studied. This may be as a result of many candidates not studying this topic at GCSE and finding the content more challenging as a result.

Key point call out

When teaching case studies, it is important that candidates practice applying these to a range of questions using the wording of the specification. This is to avoid what can read as a 'brain-dump' of knowledge with little reference to the question focus.

Themes in candidate responses

Section A:

While many candidates were able to write in-depth about the formation of landforms and their case studies, it was apparent that they found it challenging to consider the influence of climate change, and the way landforms inter-relate, which were the focus of the level questions in Section A. Many candidates would have also benefited from making links back to the question in these question as well as in the shorter response ones. For example, when linking management strategies to the coastal landscape, candidates needed to make the influence on the landscape much clearer. In general, candidates who answered Glaciated Landscapes wrote more in-depth regarding the interrelationships between landforms with many considering corries, arêtes and pyramidal peaks.

Section B:


Within Section B, many candidates demonstrated sound knowledge of the water and carbon cycle, however, a number did not tailor their answer to look at the influence of a single tree. Stronger answers argued that the importance of one tree on such cycles was likely to be minimal, and candidates who answered in this way were able to develop convincing arguments. When assessing the importance of water for humans, candidates answered this in a range of ways with many focusing on the point that it is essential for life. At times, candidates provided a list of uses of water from washing to cooking and these responses lacked the comprehensive knowledge and understanding required. Candidates that explored the impact on the water and carbon cycle, as well as the role of water in daily life and aspects such as agricultural practices were able to give both breadth and depth in their answers.

Comments on responses by question type

Skills based questions

Section A:

Basic geographical skills such as using a scale bar to measure distance and identify a landform from a resource was generally answered well by the majority of candidates. When explaining advantages of the presentation technique, candidates would benefit from ensuring their point is explained to say why it is an advantage rather than just stating that it is. Candidates can write this very concisely, however, it does need to be evident in their answer if the question stem is 'explain'. It is also worth noting this exam technique is also relevant for 1c/2c/3c where the candidates had to suggest how the management strategy or the human activity could influence the landscape. Once again candidates needed to make it clear what the influence on the landscape would be rather than just saying what would happen such as 'reduce wave erosion'.

	AfL	Expose candidates to a full range of presentation techniques and ensure they can identify specific advantages of them rather than generalised ideas such as the inclusion of a North arrow.
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Section B:

The geographical skills questions within Section B proved more challenging for a number of candidates. Whilst many candidates were able to recognise the nature of the relationship within 4ai, a large proportion of candidates were unable to interpret the statistics that had been given. Further practice in the interpretation of statistical results would have allowed candidates to approach this question in a more confident manner. For those candidates that were confident with statistics they were able to achieve full marks on 4aii and correctly referred to the correlation coefficient and significance levels.

Level of response questions


Section A:

Section A consists of two level marked questions; 1a/2a/3a, an explain question for 8 marks and 1d/2d/3d, requires candidates to assess for 16 marks. While it was evident that candidates were aware of the assessment objectives and layout of the paper, 1a and 2a continue to be areas for improvement. Whilst candidates knew the formation of the landform named, they were generally less confident on the influence of climate change on it; this was particularly the case in 2a. Although the command word is 'explain', a number of candidates focused instead on describing the landform or indeed explaining how it was formed but without reference to the influence of climate change. Many responses would have benefitted from the inclusion of Geographical terminology and a greater exploration of the points being made in order for them to be considered well-developed.

Furthermore, within the 16 mark essay question, at times candidates needed to discuss their ideas in more depth before moving on ensuring they had demonstrated comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the inter-relationships before assessing the extent to which they are inter-related. This question did prove for many candidates particularly within Coastal Systems, where the best responses focused on case studies that included spits and salt marshes. Many candidates instead referred to the Nile Delta and whilst relevant, they struggled with the complexity of this coastal environment and often did not therefore link it to the question being posed.

Section B:

It was clear that for this series, the answers to 4b have improved in quality, with candidates now not only demonstrating their knowledge and understanding but also recognising the need for application due to the AO2 credit available. On the whole candidates were able to confidently link the role of a tree to the water and carbon cycle and use key Geographical terminology within this. Very few candidates did not attempt this question, and those that did ensured they wrote about both the water and the carbon cycle. A number of candidates for Question 4b argued for the importance of a single tree for the water and carbon cycle. When making this statement often candidates did not analyse sufficiently or recognise that whilst a single tree will have a small and vital role, there are other elements to consider, for example, size of the tree, seasonal changes, or that this is one tree amongst a whole tropical rainforest. Other candidates answered the question in a very generic way, explaining the role of trees in the water and carbon cycle without recognising that the question was asking about an individual tree.

	AfL	Ensure candidates read the question carefully and pick out any key words that can affect their analysis. Also, when developing their AO2 analysis and evaluation, encourage them to avoid sweeping generalisations and instead consider counter-arguments as well as the part played by scale and time.
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The quality of answers to 4c was variable, with a number of candidates awarded Level 3 for both assessment objectives, yet a disappointing number offering only basic knowledge and understanding. At times candidate answers read like a list of different ways that water was important to humans, without any exemplification of these points. Candidates had a wealth of knowledge they could have drawn upon including links to the carbon cycle that would have allowed them to write comprehensive answers. The strongest candidates provided some excellent analysis, ranging from arguing that carbon was more important or that water was the most important due to its role socially, economically and environmentally. Some candidates also considered the importance in different areas of the world to provide a spatial analysis, which was both interesting and relevant.

Key teaching and learning points – comments on improving performance

In order to improve performance, it is important that candidates are able to tailor the use of their case study to the question being asked. Furthermore, development of AO2 analysis would be beneficial in the level of response questions to avoid candidates making sweeping statements, without analysing thoroughly and developing counterarguments to provide a full discussion.

Guidance on using this paper as a mock

There is an excellent opportunity to use this paper as a mock for students. The paper is accessible and can be completed in the time of the exam. Ensure that students are aware of the meaning of command words 'suggest' and 'explain' so that their answers are clear and focused.

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