



General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012

Geography

GEO4B

(Specification 2030)

Unit 4B: Geographical Issue Evaluation

Report on the Examination

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General

What was well done

- There was a lot of evidence of careful, detailed preparation with the Advance Information Booklet (AIB), the Poole Borough website and other interesting sources.
- Timing of candidates' answers appeared to have been good for almost all candidates. There was very little evidence of people running out of time, although most candidates had obviously used the whole time available and had written in a lot of detail.
- There were very few cases of misreading or misinterpretation of the questions. Both 'command words' and 'key words' were generally well understood and so the answers were usually well focused.

What needed improvement

- On the longer answers many weaker candidates still relied too much on lifting and paraphrasing information from the AIB, without developing the material by adding their own thoughts. These candidates need to be encouraged to use the AIB information as a starting point from which to develop their own ideas, links and connections.
- A significant minority of candidates were rather unambitious in their consideration of possible fieldwork projects to test the need for a new bridge. Their suggestions would not have been out of place for a mixed ability GCSE group but lacked the depth and the applied thought that might be expected at A Level.
- Whilst some candidates had clearly done a lot of preparation with the census data provided in Item 3 of the AIB some others did not appear to be at all familiar with the detail in this data. Moreover many did not seem to have used the data to develop any overview of the town as a whole. The best candidates had clearly looked at the data at an SOA scale but had also considered the patterns that the data as a whole showed for the whole of Poole. All candidates need to be encouraged to follow this example and consider such data at different scales, thereby developing a real sense of place of the town and its different parts.

Question 1 (a)

Almost all candidates were able to consider the influence of a variety of human factors in their answers. Popular and successful themes included:

- increased population leading to increased road traffic
- increased tourism leading to increased traffic, with a clear seasonal pattern
- the age and out-dated design of the old bridge leading to slow, inefficient operation
- the need to stimulate the area's economy – in the short term through construction work and in the long term by providing improved infrastructure.

Writing about physical geography proved more difficult for most candidates, and it was disappointing that comparatively few made any reference to the OS map extract in their answers. It had been expected that they would discuss the physical configuration of the coastline and the absence of natural crossing points on the east-west routeways. However, only a minority of candidates did this in any detail. Rather more of them discussed the problems of atmospheric pollution that must be caused by the congestion and then went on to discuss the consequences for the local ecosystems. This latter approach produced some excellent answers.

The good human geography allowed a majority of candidates to gain between 3 and 5 marks. Unfortunately many failed to progress beyond this mark because of the lack of detail in their physical geography. Those who did develop one of the two physical themes mentioned above, in addition to writing about human influences, were generally able to gain 7 or 8 marks.

Question 1 (b)

In order to gain a Level 2 mark (4 or 5) on this question it was essential that precise consideration was given to the issues of congestion and delay. It was not enough to describe a simple count of the numbers of vehicles passing at any one time.

Candidates were able to gain up to 3 marks for a Level 1 answer. Many gained these marks by giving detailed descriptions of traffic counts, their timings, the methods of recording data, health and safety procedures to be followed, etc.

The most successful ways of moving to Level 2 were (1) discussing how the group could measure delay by timing the length of wait for selected vehicles when the bridge was raised or (2) counting the number of vehicles in the queues for the bridge. Some candidates also suggested assessing the problems of congestion by carrying out questionnaire surveys – but such answers needed to go into precise detail about the questions to be asked or about how the sample would be selected. Unfortunately many candidates who suggested a questionnaire did not provide any of the detail that would have been needed for a Level 2 mark.

Question 2 (a)

This question was similar to one asked on the June 2011 GEO4B paper. It was generally much better answered than the earlier question. Candidates had obviously been better prepared for this type of question.

A large majority of candidates sensibly chose to use a choropleth map to show population density. A majority then chose either a located bar or a located pie map for the housing data. Unfortunately some candidates chose bar charts or pie charts, but did not make any reference to locating these on or around a map, and so limited their marks. A minority of candidates suggested drawing choropleth maps for housing tenure, but this was unsuitable because the data does not show density of the types of tenure, so a choropleth map was quite unsuitable.

In both parts of the answer, a majority of candidates chose to give some details about how chosen technique should be carried out. Whilst this was not specifically asked for it was a good approach. It allowed candidates to gain marks within Level 1 but, more importantly, it often provided a good introduction to a detailed justification. For instance describing the number of sets to be used or the types of shading to apply on the choropleth map often led to a clear explanation of why this type of map is clear and easy to interpret. Similarly, describing the mechanics of drawing bars or pies led naturally into a justification of their suitability for showing clear information about each SOA, and also allowing easy comparisons of the patterns across the Borough.

Question 2(b)

As candidates had been able to study Item 3 in the AIB for several weeks before the examination, they were expected to be very familiar with the data it contained. In fact, a majority seemed to have a reasonable level of familiarity with the data, and to understand some of the implications. These candidates were able to write reasonable answers, which showed some understanding of the nature of the urban structure of Poole.

A minority of candidates had prepared superbly, and had obviously spent a lot of time mapping and analysing the data; then they were able to use what they had learned with ease to make very detailed references to different areas, showing a very clear sense of place in their answers. Unfortunately there was another group of candidates who seemed to have done very little preparation; they were unable to select relevant data, and nor were they able to make much sense of the patterns in the data.

Most candidates focused their answers on a small selection of SOAs at the extremes of the socio-economic spectrum. In their answers they generally discussed differences in housing density, housing tenure, and one or two employment categories. They usually concluded that there were some groupings of richer and poorer people.....and that there were some SOAs that fell in between the extremes. Such answers usually reached the bottom of Level 2 in the mark scheme.

When candidates went on to locate the two or three selected areas precisely within Poole Borough, usually by reference to ideas of inner urban/suburban areas, their marks went up within Level 2. The best answers reached Level 3 by moving beyond this to develop an overview of the patterns in the Borough as a whole, making references to information from the OS map extract. In some cases, candidates even drew sketch maps showing urban socio-economic zones for the whole of Poole.

Some other very good answers achieved Level 3 by concentrating on the phrase from the question - 'to what extent' are socio-economic groupings shown. These answers noted that all SOAs have a majority of houses in owner occupation, and that all SOAs have a spread of occupation types. So these answers generally concluded that although some socio-economic groupings could be seen there were large areas which could only be classed as 'indeterminate'. Some of these answers recognised that the size of the SOA units did not allow for subtle distinctions to be made and realised that smaller units might have allowed much more differentiation of socio-economic zones.

Question 2(c)

The best answers to this question did some of the following:

- located Poole's most deprived areas, often by referring back to their answers in 2(b);
- quoted from the AIB to outline the redevelopment plans;
- then elaborated and up-dated the details on the plans by referring to their own research;
- developed very clear links between the needs of people in the 'more deprived areas' and the details of the redevelopment plans
- referred to specific types of jobs, specific types of housing and specific improvements in the environment and infrastructure that might meet the people's needs;
- discussed both short term and long term improvements that are being planned;
- showed awareness that some of the more deprived areas are actually in Hamworthy Gate but that some are in other parts of Poole – and that the two areas would be affected in different ways by the planned redevelopments.

There were very few answers that did not score at least 4 marks for this question. However, candidates who scored between 4 and 6 marks generally lacked precision. Common features of these answers were:

- references to 'new jobs' without any specific mention of the types of jobs that might meet the needs of people in deprived areas;
- vague references to 'housing' again without clear reference to the needs of the people in the area;
- LACK of a 'sense of place' or lack of any specific understanding of the Hamworthy area and of the other more deprived parts of the town;
- a lot of lifting of quotes from the AIB without further development of the candidate's own ideas.

Question 3

There were very few poor answers to this question; almost all candidates were reasonably well prepared for a question that dealt with this topic in some way. The best answers to the question dealt with some or all of the following themes:

- the special nature of the local ecosystem;
- the complex links between different elements of the ecosystem;
- the complex links between different areas of Poole Harbour and its surrounds;
- the different scales of area that linked into the wildlife of the area, including national, European and World;
- the need to conserve the ecosystem for its own sake but also for the sake of the area's tourist industry and for the general well-being of the local population;
- the reasonable nature of the restrictions, which still allow considerable freedom of working on the redevelopment;
- the legal force of the restrictions within the whole planning system – and therefore the costs that could arise if the restrictions were not respected.
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It was possible to gain Level 3 marks either by writing in depth on two or three of these themes, or by writing more broadly about most of them.

When the poorer answers were encountered, they were usually characterised by two features. Firstly, there was an absence of precise reference to the real and special nature of the places that were being discussed. Secondly, and more importantly, there was a lot of 'lifting' of information from the AIB and very little 'using' of that information. Candidates failed to elaborate on the AIB information by developing their own ideas, and showing their own understanding of the issues. These answers often went through each of the restrictions mentioned in the AIB - justifying them solely in terms that did not go beyond paraphrasing what was already in the AIB.