C A R I B B E A N E X A M I N A T I O N S C O U N C I L

REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION MAY/JUNE 2008

GEOGRAPHY

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GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION

MAY/JUNE 2008

GENERAL COMMENTS

This year, there were 12, 284 candidates writing the CSEC Geography examination. Almost the same number as in 2007 (which had 12, 161).

In Paper 2, Map-reading continues to be a challenge to the majority of candidates. In that paper, the popular questions in Sections C and D were well answered. The School Based Assessment projects suffered from Aims which were not specific. Many of the candidates writing the Alternative Paper 3/2 seem to have had no experience in doing research in the field and preparing a report.

In Paper 2, many candidates showed a weakness in using geographical vocabulary and understanding concepts. The mark allocation was not used as a guide to the length of the answer required. Some answers were too long while some were far too short. Candidates need to number their answers (and the parts thereof) to match the numbers on the question paper.

While 63.2 per cent of the candidates earned Grades I – III, there was a large number who wrote the examination although not ready.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01

Paper 01 comprised 60 multiple-choice questions. Performance was satisfactory. The mean score was 61.7 per cent. It was 63.5 per cent in 2007.

Paper 02

Question 1

This was a compulsory map-reading question worth 28 marks. Candidates showed lack of practice in map-reading. About 70 per cent earned less than 10 marks. Unfortunately the map was printed with some smudges, however, this did not affect any area needed to answer the question. Thus the smudging would not have affected the candidates' ability to answer any part of the question.

Part (a) (i) required a six-figure grid reference as the answer. Over 80 per cent of the candidates knew how to give the reference correctly - having the easting before the northing. Some of them lost marks for having the wrong decimal fractions or giving a four-figure reference. Candidates should know that, when there is a choice, the lower fraction is to be used. Others made errors in the sequence by placing the northing first or by putting punctuation marks between the easting and northing numbers or the letters E and N after the easting and northing numbers respectively.

Part (a) (ii) tested the candidates' ability to measure a curved line and use the scale to calculate the distance on the ground in kilometres and metres. Most were able to do so but some wasted time giving an answer in kilometres and then another in metres. Some failed to state the units while others seemed to have no concept of distance by giving an answer of 1500 kilometres.

Part (a) (iii) was well done. The task of measuring a bearing greater than 180 degrees posed no challenge to the majority of the candidates.

Part (a) (iv) was also well done though some candidates confused compass direction and bearing. Some did not know the 16-point compass. For example, some wrote of a "South East South direction".

Part (b) provided a grid on which a sketch cross-section was to be drawn. This was not well done. Nearly half the candidates omitted this part and few of those who attempted it earned full marks, this, despite the fact that only a sketch cross-section was needed. Candidates should have identified the highest and lowest contour points on both sides of the valley and changes in the gradient, as shown by the spacing of the contours, bearing the two vertical intervals in mind. Practice in drawing accurate cross-sections would make this a simple question. Alternatively, practice in following a northing or easting and mentally "seeing" the land rise and fall would help.

Parts (c) (i) and (ii) tested the candidates' ability to use the key. Only about 5 per cent got this part completely wrong. Errors were made in interpretation and the key's style of the terms, "landform along the coast", "landform" and "agricultural land use". For example, a coastal landform, such as bay, instead of the landform along the coast (cliff) was identified or "cliff or quarry" was given as both are presented in the same line in the key. Many did not recognise 'pasture' as a form of agricultural land use but suggested 'trees' and 'scrub' or 'forest plantation'.

Part (d) was not well done. Candidates were to describe the distribution of banana plantations on the map. Some attempted to account for the distribution, which was not necessary and earned no marks. Many candidates were vague in their descriptions ("along rivers"). If candidates would think of giving instructions to someone to make a model of the map and then directing the placement of the banana plantations on the model, their descriptions would improve.

Part (e) was also not well done. As in Part (d), descriptions were vague. The same advice applies. If candidates would think of giving instructions to someone to make a model of the map and then directing the placement of the types of settlement on the model, their descriptions would improve. Many gave general descriptions defining the types of settlement without reference to the map. Some listed examples but gave no description of the position. Some confused isolated and dispersed patterns.

Part (f) asked for a comparison of three features of the drainage in the areas east and west of the Rio Grande for a maximum of 6 marks. About 45 per cent earned 3 marks or more but approximately 40 per cent earned zero. Many candidates gave definitions of three drainage patterns but made no reference to examples on the map. Some gave examples from the east or west but made no comparison.
A surprisingly large number of candidates gave a comparison of relief and vegetation and of settlement. This may have been the result of misreading the question.

Question 2

This question tested a candidate's ability to use data in a table, to describe the processes along plate margins, to explain the difference in the cross-sections of a river valley and to explain the formation of spits and tombolos. It was, by far, the most popular question in Section B yet less than 1 per cent earned over 20 marks from a maximum of 24. In all parts of the question, a better grasp of concepts and a better geographical vocabulary would have helped.

In Part (a), many candidates gained full marks in using the table. Some had difficulty calculating the number of landslides per square kilometre in Part (iii). Candidates should be encouraged to show their working whenever

making a calculation, rather than just giving the answer. On occasions, they may be credited for the process if an error is made in the calculation.

In Part (b) (i), most of the candidates identified two correct landforms formed at plate boundaries but some gave activities, such at earthquakes, folding and faulting. In Part (b) (ii), too many confused the terms convergent and divergent. Some also spoke of lava moving up between the plates not realising it is magma that does so. Magma produces lava on the surface.

Part (c) was not well done as many candidates dealt with changes in the long profile of the valley, instead of the cross-section in the upper and lower courses as required by the question. Long descriptions of the features found in the long profile, such as waterfalls, meanders and oxbow lakes, apart from being the wrong answers, indicated that the allocated 4 marks was not used as a guide.

In Part (d), candidates had a satisfactory understanding of the processes but were unable to earn full marks as they did not illustrate their explanations with well annotated diagrams. Some, in error, said spits and tombolos are the result of erosion. Some had diagrams showing a spit developing on a straight coast with no cause for deposition. Well drawn and fully annotated diagrams could have earned full marks.

Question 3

This question was not popular. It tested knowledge of coral reefs and also the candidate's ability to draw diagrams of meander features and to explain the formation of waterfalls and deltas. Performance was satisfactory and would have been better if geographical terms had been mastered.

In Part (a), candidates knew the terms but had difficulty showing them in a diagram. There was also the incorrect interchange of the terms "river cliff" and "river bluff", "point bar" and "slip-off slope".

Part (b), requiring a description of the conditions for coral growth and the nature of barrier reefs and fringing reefs, was generally well done. Some candidates did confuse "narrow" with "shallow", and "wide" with "deep" in describing the two types of reefs. Many failed to indicate that the reefs were formed by coral.

Part (c) was also well done but many candidates failed to earn full marks because they did not explain the processes fully. In explaining the formation of waterfalls many only considered resistant bands of rock in the river channel. On this point, some confused "resistant" with "impermeable". In explaining the formation of deltas, most ignored the deposition pattern of sediments and the role of distributaries and salt water. A strange error was a claim that deltas were formed by wave action.

Question 4

This was the least popular question in Section B. It tested the candidates' skill in using a table showing temperatures and relative humidity, their knowledge of Caribbean weather systems and of the adaptation of vegetation to two different climatic regions. Most of the answers were weak.

Parts (a) (i) and (ii) had satisfactory responses but in (iii) very few candidates recognised the inverse relationship between temperature and relative humidity. Some did not use the information in the table in answering this part.

Part (b) tested knowledge of tropical waves. The responses showed a lack of knowledge. Some confused tropical waves with hurricanes. In addition, in Part (b) (ii), candidates failed to identify the elements which they had chosen to describe, and responses were not specific to tropical waves.

In Part (c), many candidates did not know the distinctive characteristics of each type of vegetation. Only about 24 per cent of the candidates gave good answers to this part. Many failed to earn full marks because they did not compare the same properties of the vegetation. They listed various characteristics of each type without cross matching them.

Question 5

The question tested candidates' understanding of urbanisation in the Caribbean – causes, effects and measures to reduce it. It was attempted by about 53 per cent of the candidates but responses were generally weak. Part (a) required candidates to draw a sketch map of a Caribbean country showing areas of settlement of varied population density. Many have not yet mastered the skill of drawing a good sketch map and locating areas on it. Using geometric shapes as a skeleton for drawing an outline would help to develop this skill. Some candidates showed "an area" by a dot. They should have outlined and shaded or labelled a part of the map to show an area of high or low population.

In Part (b) (i), candidates were required to define the term urbanisation. This was poorly done as the majority defined it as a movement from rural areas to urban areas. The response required was that 'urbanisation is an increase in the proportion of the population living in towns and cities'.

Part (b) (ii) was fairly well done. Many candidates were able to explain that migration caused urbanisation by outlining the push-pull factors but many did not recognise that natural increase also played a role.

The response to Part (b) (iii) was satisfactory. Too many candidates, however, ignored that they were only required to discuss ONE negative effect of urbanisation and listed many negative effects and this resulted in lack of depth in the discussion.

Part (b) (iv) posed some difficulty. The candidates were required to outline measures aimed at controlling urbanisation. Too many responses were vague and failed to outline clearly the measures. In a number of cases, candidates outlined measures in urban areas rather than rural areas.

Acceptable responses included the following specific examples:

- Diversifying agriculture – non-traditional crops
- Providing jobs by building factories in rural areas
- Decentralising development
- The provision of services, for example, hospitals and tertiary institutions in rural areas

Question 6

The question sought to test candidates' knowledge of economic activities – the changes and challenges. Approximately 10 per cent of students attempted the question.

Part (a) of the question was fairly well done. However, the majority of candidates did not label the diagram. Some candidates were unable to use the information in the table to construct a pie chart. A small percentage of candidates drew bar graphs instead of the required pie chart.

In Part (b), candidates tended to misinterpret the question by giving challenges, when they were required to give changes. The changes provided by candidates were not specific to any particular economic activity but were just general.

In Part (c), candidates provided two activities within the same economic sector instead of giving challenges from any TWO economic sectors as required.

Question 7

The question tested candidates' knowledge and understanding of agriculture and its importance to the Caribbean.

It was attempted by approximately 35 per cent of the candidates and 60 per cent of them gave good responses.

Part (a) of the question required candidates to draw a bar graph to illustrate given data. This was fairly well done by some candidates. However, the majority did not earn maximum marks owing to inadequate labelling and inaccuracy in bar construction. Some candidates also constructed line graphs while others proceeded to draw their own graph in the answer script even though an insert was provided for such.

Part (b) (i) tested candidates' knowledge of the definition of the term agriculture. The responses were fairly well done.

Part (b) (ii) was also fairly well done by the majority of the candidates. This part of the question tested the candidates' knowledge of the importance of agriculture to the region. Candidates regularly listed points, but many of them failed to elaborate on the points given to earn maximum marks. Candidates, however, generally had a good understanding of the importance of agriculture in the Caribbean.

Part (c) called for a comparison of peasant farming and commercial arable farming in a named Caribbean territory. Many good responses were given for this part of the question resulting in many candidates gaining at least 70 per cent of the allocated marks. It must be noted, however, that many candidates failed to name a country, for which there was a penalty. Some candidates also referred to Canada and Nigeria rather than to a Caribbean territory.

While many candidates showed an extensive knowledge of the farming systems, many were often not specific enough. For example, candidates used terms such as 'small' and 'big' with no reference to actual farm sizes. Of the three categories, the one requiring candidates to compare, "farming methods" proved most difficult.

Many marks were not earned because candidates did not expand adequately on questions.

Question 8

This question tested the candidates' knowledge of the impact of natural hazards and the precautions taken to reduce their impact. This was a popular question and many candidates were able to give satisfactory answers.

Part (a) (i) was well done. However, candidates experienced difficulties in interpreting the table in (a) (ii) and finding percentages in (a) (iii).

Part (b) was well done although some candidates did not identify a country. The weaker candidates lacked the ability to develop the points which should have centred around physical, social and economic factors. Many even identified the emotional trauma associated with hazards.

In Part (c), although several precautions were identified, many candidates failed to explain how those precautions could be used to reduce the impact.

Question 9

This question tested the candidates' understanding of pollution – types, impact and preventative measures.

Part (a) was well done as candidates were able to identify the country. In Part (a) (i), most candidates were able to calculate the change. Part (a) (ii) was poorly done as candidates appeared not to understand that the question was asking them to state the correlation.

Part (b) was satisfactorily done. However, many of the students confused the term air pollution and global warming. In addition, many candidates failed to describe the causes of river pollution.

In Part (c), most candidates were able to identify plausible measures but failed to fully explain how they have helped to reduce land pollution and emissions of greenhouse gases. Many candidates identified reafforestation as a measure to reduce greenhouse emissions. While reafforestation may help to regulate the amount of CO_2 in the air, it does not reduce its emissions.

Question 10

This question tested knowledge of the greenhouse effect and the effect of global warming on developed countries and small island developing countries. It was the least popular question in the examination.

In Part (i) of Section (a), candidates had some difficulty in reading the graph and coming up with the correct answer. However, Part (ii) of Section (a) was correctly answered by most.

In Part (b), many candidates were not able to describe accurately the greenhouse effect phenomenon as was required.

In Part (c), some candidates could not correctly identify the greenhouse gases. There were many instances where candidates mentioned carbon monoxide as a greenhouse gas. Candidates were unable to describe how the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases was being augmented.

There were some good responses in Part (d). Candidates were able to explain the measures implemented to reduce greenhouse gases in developed countries.

In Part (e), many candidates were able to make accurate comparisons between Caribbean countries, and Mauritius or the Maldives. However, candidates were unable to describe clearly the topography of Mauritius and the Maldives.

Paper 3/1 – (School Based Assessment)

There were two concerns which many projects raised – the nature of the aim of the study and the cooperation of students in writing their reports as a group. The aims were too wide and vague. Some classes did joint field work and the students then submitted reports which were almost identical but for the student's name. From the assessments, it is clear that many teachers condoned these approaches.

Aims will be discussed below. On the issue of common reports, the syllabus clearly states on Page 23, "groups of students may work on the same or different aspects of a general topic taken from any System in the syllabus, but individual reports must be submitted." This can be compared to bands playing the same tune but each band having its own arrangement. Each student should take the raw data from the field and use it to prepare his own report with illustrations.

Table of Contents

The SBA does require Acknowledgement, Introduction and Description of The Study. It requires a Table of Contents. In many cases, page numbers were missing or pages were incorrectly numbered.

Aim of Study

Proper field studies could not be undertaken since some aims were not clear and specific. The aims should be realistic and should be worded so as to allow for the collection of primary data. The scope of study should not be national but, preferably, kept at community level. If students would think of what they want to measure in the field and then make that their stated aim in the form of a question or statement, there would be better projects. Such an aim should produce a set of data collection techniques that will provide useful, valid information.

Location of Study Area

Many maps of the study areas did not show enough detail and they were often untidy and poorly presented. It is advised that candidates present one map of the country showing clearly the location of the study area, and a detailed sketch map of the site. The site maps should highlight features such as roads, rivers and adjacent settlements. These site maps are to show the location and are not to be confused with floor plans of a factory or a "site map" of the buildings or farm. Candidates should be reminded to include scale, key or legend, north point and title. Many candidates copied/downloaded maps without crediting the sources. Marks were awarded only where there was evidence of the candidate's work added to the map.

Methodology

There were too many cases where enough detail was not given on how the data were collected. The instruments used to collect data, such as questionnaires, tally sheets, interview schedules and worksheets, were not stated in some cases and copies of the same were not placed in the appendix or referenced. Questionnaires and interviews often collected information which was not needed for the aim of the project. Every bit of information should be answering the research question.

Presentation of Data

Ideally, presentation of data and analysis and discussion should not be separated. It was found that photographs were often overused and, at times, not relevant to the studies. Photographs and diagrams should be numbered, titled and labelled. Graphs should be drawn accurately and also labelled and numbered. Candidates who attempted studies of coastal areas did not draw sketches of features seen at the study areas. Candidates are to refrain from including actual samples of soil and other produce.

Quality of Data

Data must always be relevant to the aim and should be comprehensive to achieve the aim of the study.

Analysis and Discussion

In many SBAs, points were merely listed. Discussions were not often well-developed and coherent. Candidates are reminded to avoid relying on secondary data in the discussion of the findings. In many studies, the illustrations used were not integrated in the text. Although illustrations were placed in the studies, some of them were not referred to at any point in the discussion. They were seen as being only decorative.

Conclusion

Many conclusions were inconsistent with the aims of the studies and, at times, were too lengthy. New data should not be introduced in this section. The conclusion should be a summary of the findings and answer the question posed in the Aim. It may include a comment on the suitability of the method used to collect data.

Communication of Information

There were too many grammatical and spelling errors.

Bibliography

This section was poorly done. The authors' names were not in alphabetical order. In many cases, the year of publication was omitted.

PAPER 3/2 -- (Alternative To School Based Assessment)

The paper was manageable but less than a third of the candidates scored over 20 marks. Lack of experience in conducting field work and in presenting a report may account for this. The paper seeks to assess these skills.

Question 1

The candidates were required to draw a sketch map and insert certain features. Some candidates did just that but did not label them or provide a key.

Question 2

The majority of candidates did not understand the question. They were required to frame a research question or hypothesis for a traffic survey.

Question 3 (a), (b) and (c)

The candidates' lack of experience with field projects was evident. The description of the type of information to be collected and how it would be done proved challenging.

Question 4 (a)

Most candidates demonstrated fair knowledge of plotting points for the graph and therefore scored maximum points.

Question 4 (b)

The candidates needed to place more emphasis on interpretation rather than listing the characteristics of the pattern.

Question 5 (a)and (b)

The majority of candidates were unable to draw the pie chart. However, most knew another method to illustrate the data.

Question 5 (c)

The candidates were required to make a comparison and needed to compare the same aspects or components of the data.

Question 6

Most candidates showed poor knowledge of the format required for the bibliography. As a result, they failed to score any marks for this question.