General

The paper followed a well-established format. The first part of each structured question was related to a resource with an element of skill testing. The second part largely tested subject knowledge. The third part was discursive and required candidates to consider different perspectives, using knowledge, understanding and evidence, where appropriate, in supporting the response. The essays were typically broad in focus allowing candidates to bring in a range of case studies and subject knowledge in generating responses. Command words required discussion or assessment/evaluation or a combination of both.

On the structured questions it is important to note that the first part of each question required substantial engagement with the resource provided. Weaker responses drifted into prior knowledge and learned case studies rather than focusing the responses around the specific question and the information provided in the resource.

The second part of each structured question generally differentiated well. Those with secure subject knowledge generally scored well and accessed mid/high Level Two. Those who were less secure demonstrated misunderstandings or guessed the answers. Their answers scored low marks or no marks at all.

The key learning point for the final part of each structured questions relates to command words. Discussion requires consideration of a range of material with detailed support where appropriate. Simply reciting case studies or learned theory was not enough to access higher marks.

On the essay questions, many good and outstanding responses were seen. These responses focused clearly upon the question, with detailed subject knowledge and case study support. These better responses typically argued well and were critical of the material they considered. Conclusions reached were sound and clearly based upon preceding content. There was also a clear structure to such responses with good evidence of planning prior to commencement of the response. Less strong responses leaned heavily upon subject knowledge and learned case studies, without clearly linking such material to the context of the question. These responses were predominantly descriptive and narrative, lacking critical engagement with the theme and demands of each question.
Section A

Option 1 Plate Tectonics and Associated Hazards

Question 01

Most responses noted the tectonic setting and destructive nature of the plate boundaries surrounding Japan. Some missed the epicentre being located on the boundary of the North American and Pacific plates. Following this, most went on to see the Modified Mercalli Intensity decreasing with distance from the epicentre. Use of map evidence was generally not as strong a feature as expected. Scale, direction and place names could have been used more effectively. Weaker responses drifted into case study material rather than focusing directly upon the information provided.

Question 02

Trenches were generally well explained, though some misunderstood their formation and instead explained the formation of ridges. Description of the basic characteristics of trenches and arcs was lacking in many responses. Relatively simple aspects of form could gain credit here. A named example also helped. Arc formation was too often misunderstood and replaced with hotspot theory which was not creditworthy. Similarly, description of the characteristics was generally less well done. It is important to note that whilst the more straightforward command word was ‘describe’, too many lost relatively straightforward credit by failing to describe both landforms.

Question 03

Most candidates were able to describe some evidence for plate movement. Weaker responses lacked detail and offered limited breadth in a predominantly descriptive fashion. Stronger responses offered greater breadth of evidence and more detail in description. Discussion came in the form of evolving evidence over time and increasingly compelling scientific evidence in more recent decades.

Option 2 - Weather and Climate and Associated Hazards

Question 04

Description was generally well done by most. Weaker answers did not make the link between the Annual Accumulated Cyclone Energy (ACE) and the Running Average. Such responses were fairly limited, focusing upon year-on-year change instead of taking the overview. Better responses made the link and also made effective use of data in supporting the description. Comment largely came in relation to the recent increase in the ACE and its potential link to global warming. Others suggested a link between increases Running Average ACE and one off recent major events such as Hurricane Katrina.

Question 05

Descriptive detail was important in this question. Most candidates used Hurricane Katrina as their chosen case study though other events did feature. The limiting factor was a lack of detail and lack of sense of place. When detailed impacts specific to the chosen location were evident, top Level Two was readily accessed. Too many candidates wrote about generic impacts which could apply to any place which limited credit.
Question 06

Too many responses drifted into impacts and failed to note the emphasis on a storm event in the UK. Many used the 1987 storm and wrote in detail about the responses from local agencies, emergency services and the MET Office (in terms of improving prediction methodologies). Such responses scored well.

Option 3 Ecosystems: Challenge and Change

Question 07

Comment was rather disappointing in this question. Too many responses did not extend beyond the sorts of activities available to people using the park. Better responses referred to impact of human activities on the local ecosystem and the opportunities for conservation and habitat preservation.

Question 08

Those who focused upon a small scale area and described the physical/environmental characteristics scored well. Some had not prepared well for this question and wrote in very broad terms about much larger areas such as a national park or even a very large conservation area such as Antarctica / Amazonia. These responses could not offer the sort of detail required.

Question 09

Species such as the Grey Squirrel, Japanese Knotweed and Oxford Ragwort featured in many responses. However, there was some confusion between that which was a planned introduction of a species and an unplanned introduction of a species. The other issue was the impact upon the ecosystem. Many responses could not adequately discuss the impact of the species introduction upon the related ecosystem. Those that did scored well, this mainly focusing upon outcompeting the indigenous species for light water, food and / or nutrients.

Section B

Option 4 – World Cities

Question 10

This question differentiated well. The strongest responses identified the local stakeholders as pivotal in working together to improve the environment of the area so that economic activity could develop further with the social improvements that this would bring. Weaker responses wrote in simple terms about the businesses that may come and the jobs that might be created. Such simplistic responses were held to Level One.

Question 11

Some candidates misunderstood the question and wrote about central area regeneration strategies such as Liverpool One. No credit was available for this approach. The other limiting factor was detail. Those responses comprising generic terminology about characteristics which could apply to any out of town centre retailing area were held back. Better answers considered geographical
location and access, specific size and build characteristics as well as specific services at their named case study.

Question 12

Responses were fairly evenly between waste and transport management. The key to a successful response was detail on the strategies and explicit assessment or evaluation. Candidates took a variety of approaches, but the most successful contrasted approaches in different parts of the world. Transport in Curitiba contrasted with London was a common approach. This was largely successful provided detailed strategies were assessed. Some were a little sensational in evaluating ‘Boris Bikes’ for example and lacked breadth.

Option 5 – Development and Globalisation

Question 13

There were some obvious points to make about the scale of Indian trade and the dominance of relatively few trading partners within the top ten. These overview points were not well explored. Also there were plenty of opportunities to manipulate data which were not always taken. Those who did describe in some detail and offer some manipulation of data readily accessed credit. Comment was very broad with suggestions made as to why USA and China were such significant trading partners as well as the sorts of goods and services which may be traded. This was a valid approach.

Question 14

This question differentiated well. Some had not prepared well for a question about the growth of China and wrote in generic terms about the preconditions for growth in newly industrialising countries over the last 30 years or so. This was typical of a low Level One response. Better responses could offer specific detail about the growth which has taken place in China with specific policy details about how China has increased trade, developed a strong service sector, an industrial sector, as well as developing its own internal markets.

Question 15

There were a variety of ways of approaching this question. Some considered the impact of the growth and development of the emerging markets aided by new communication and transport technologies. References to a burgeoning service sector in India fuelled by inward investment by British companies such as BT, utilising modern internet and ICT technologies featured in many responses. Others saw new markets in much broader terms and considered the fact that the new transport and communication technologies have opened up new possibilities for producer countries looking to develop new export markets in perishable goods for example. This was also a valid approach.
Option 6 – Contemporary Conflicts and Issues

Question 16

The description was generally not well undertaken. It was not clear from reading many responses that the photograph was being described in detail. Candidates need a lot more practice in responding to the command word ‘describe’ when related to a resource such as this. Better responses identified the physical and human characteristics in detail as the evidence that a conflict may well have recently taken place. Comment came in many forms and anything which could be reasonably linked to the photograph was accepted.

Question 17

There was some confusion between origin and expression of conflict. Some weaker responses drifted into expressions of conflict in this answer and scored no credit. Most understood that origins related to the causes of conflict. These were often supported by detailed case studies which occasionally drifted into long description of the named case study rather than a focus upon the origin itself. The Arab-Israeli conflict featured strongly here with reference to conflict of water, land and religious ideology. Provided the origin itself was clear, candidates accessed good credit.

Question 18

The expressions of conflict relate broadly to violent and non-violent conflict. The differentiator was the detail in reference to examples as well as the breadth of expressions considered. Those who considered few expressions still scored well if the detail and support was strong as well as evidence of discussion. The best responses offered a range of conflicts at a variety of scales and clearly distinguished between different expressions of conflict.

Section C

Question 19

The ‘technology’ aspect of the question could have incorporated a broad range of tools used to predict, measure, map, and respond to earthquakes. Modern building design could also have been considered. Too many could not offer any real detail on the range of technologies available. Those that did have a range of technologies then went on to develop arguments within their chosen case studies, often critically and contrasting approaches in different parts of the world. Haiti and Japan featured strongly here.

Question 20

Many responses simply described the impact of different air masses upon the British Isles in summer and winter. Whilst this was relevant it really only formed part of a limited response. Better responses considered how the air masses interacted and created common weather features such as depressions and anticyclones. More critical responses considered other factors affecting the climate of the British Isles such as the latitude, altitude, ocean currents and atmospheric circulation. These responses tended to score highly.
Question 21

In simple terms the current vegetation is much more the outcome of human activity than natural processes. It is hard to argue in any other way. Candidates did look at succession processes and link this to natural climatic climax vegetation in the British Isles, the oak woodland. Others considered psammoseres as an alternative succession process. Better answers then went on to look at the multitude of examples where human activity has modified natural vegetation creating plagioclimax vegetation (such as heather moorland). The impact of farming and urbanisation also featured in these responses.

Question 22

A key differentiator in this question was the detail candidates offered in support of their answers. Most understood that problems needed to cover issues related to housing, transport, sanitation, waste and pollution, education and healthcare provision. Better answers were able to note that the challenges do indeed vary in scale and emphasis, depending upon location. Case studies were a relatively strong feature though many used these in a descriptive context rather than in specific relation to the question. Those who noted that finding sustainable solutions is a complex problem, scored well.

Question 23

The key to success with this question was in understanding the complex way in which transnational corporations (TNCs) operate. Responses which accessed the highest marks understood the positive and negative impacts which TNCs bring to host communities. More simplistic responses were overly positive about the role and impact of TNCs without demonstrating the critical awareness of the issues associated TNCs. The best responses often developed their chosen impacts within a framework of social, economic, political and environmental issues.

Question 24

This question provided significant challenge for some candidates who were evidently less well prepared. Too many candidates wrote about conflicts around the world with only very tentative links to development. Responses needed to engage with the impact of security upon the development of a country. Better responses used case studies well and clearly demonstrated the impact of the lack of security upon various development indicators. This was one valid approach. Others looked at the impact of a range of security issues, not just war, considering food, energy and water security as well as political security. Provided there was clear link to development, such responses scored well.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator