Exam links

Using this issue for AQA AS and A2 geography

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Urban change in Moscow

This article provides excellent case-study material for that part of the A2 Human option *World cities* that examines the theme of urban change including regeneration, with particular reference to gentrification. This process is now taking place in a wide variety of cities around the world, and here is an interesting context — Moscow, the capital of Russia — which still retains a legacy of its former Soviet past. The concepts of land ownership, house ownership and planning processes are relatively new within this rapidly growing city, and, as with similar well-documented areas, the outcome has been one of difference of opinion and close juxta-positioning of social groups. This will make interesting reading for students of this option.

Question and answer Cold environments

This ‘Question and answer’ will be of direct interest to many students of the AS specification, as a large number study the physical option *Cold environments*. This Q&A is based on the questions that were set in June 2012 on the Geog 1 examination paper. This set of questions illustrates well the variety of questions that could be set on any one of the physical options — a (relatively) straightforward opener asking for a description of a distribution on a map, followed by further data-handling assessment — in this case based on text and a photographic image. Finally, there is an extended prose question requiring both breadth and depth of subject knowledge, but one which also requires correct interpretation of the task given. Students would do well to heed the excellent advice offered here.

Everybody’s talking about… Consumption

This highly synoptic article should be required reading for all students of A-level geography, and in particular for students of the two options (AS: *Population change*, A2: *Development and globalisation*) identified above. Simon Oakes explains the impact that rising populations and personal living standards are having and will have on the world’s resources, but at the same time moves us on from previous simple models of population/resources relationships. As he states, many writers in the past
have assumed that humankind would live a largely frugal existence, and that wealth and the desire to spend that wealth would lie in the hands of a few. This is no longer the case, with rising numbers of middle classes and aspirant youth in the emerging nations — the new consumer classes — who are already having an impact in a wide variety of ways — from mobile phones to designer brands to shark fins.

**Amrun: an island under threat**

This article will be of general interest to students of both the AS Physical option *Coastal environments* and the A2 Physical option *Ecosystems: change and challenge*. It can be used as exemplar and illustrative material to those sections examining sea level change and fragile ecosystems respectively. The article features the island of Amrun, located in the North Sea off the west coast of Germany. The island, and the waters between it and the mainland - the Waddensea - are the home to a particular set of natural environments, containing a number of rare species of flora and fauna. The island is under threat from rising sea levels caused by a range of processes, some of which are based on predictions well into the future. However, the threats are real and will need careful management to protect all of the plants, animals and people involved.

**Development update The role of the media**

This interesting ‘Development update’ provides useful support material for the study of the A2 Human option *Development and globalisation*, and in particular that section dealing with cultural aspects of the two concepts. The prevalence of radio, television and other forms of media within a country is an indicator of its level of social development, though there are many complicating elements to this relationship, such as ownership, bias, competition and even safety for journalists. This comprehensive article looks at each of these aspects through a selection of national case studies in Ghana and South Africa as well as a range of smaller-scale examples. However, before this the author briefly examines the way in which the media in the ‘North’ continue to report events and issues in the ‘South’ using images of disaster and war. You may want to ask yourself if national charity events such as Comic Relief have had any impact on this style of reporting? On the face of it, it would appear not.

Finally, an important aspect of synoptic understanding within geography is to appreciate that people from different standpoints may have differing views on an issue. Understanding the media in a country or region is one aspect of this, for example comparing coverage of the same news story on Al Jazeera (Qatar) and on Fox (USA).

**News watch Frack attack**

This piece is the first of a new series of articles examining contemporary geographical issues in the news — in this case the contentious issue of natural gas extraction through ‘fracking’. Simon Oakes explains what fracking is, and discusses the reasons why its use in the UK may be potentially controversial. Keeping up with modern-day events is an important element of ‘thinking like a geographer’, and hence all A-level students are encouraged to make this series essential reading.

**The Jurassic coast: extreme weather and erosion in 2012**
The Jurassic coast of Dorset and east Devon is perhaps the best known and most explored area of coastline in the world, let alone the UK. In recent years, and particularly in 2012, the wetter than normal climate has resulted in a series of rockfalls and landslips along this coastline, in one case killing a tourist. This article examines the varying types of mass movement and other sub-aerial processes that can take place on such a coastline, and reviews the geological and climatic reasons for the increase in such events. It is of great use to students of the AS physical option Coastal environments.

Clearly the public need to be kept informed of such movements, and where possible appropriate management strategies need to be employed — for tourists, property owners and farmers. This article examines the issues that such management creates for decision makers in the area, especially when the area is also rich in fossils, and fossil collectors of all ages may choose to ignore safety warnings.

**Online Rivers**

All students of the AQA A-level course take the compulsory core topic of Rivers, floods and management. The academic world is awash (sic) with material on this fundamental area of geographical study, both in the classroom and outdoors (see later). This ‘Online’ provides a number of useful websites linked to this theme — on the location, causes and management of flooding, together with some interesting links to the more theoretical aspects of hydrology and associated geomorphology. In this latter area, teachers will find some useful downloadable PowerPoint presentations.

**Environment today Seoul: environmental issues in a world city**

This brief article provides excellent case study material for two sections of the A2 course: the A2 physical option Weather and climate and associated hazards (urban climates); and the A2 human option World cities (contemporary sustainability issues in urban areas). The rapid growth of Seoul in the 1980s had significant environmental impacts on the atmosphere and green spaces within its urban area. Nick Middleton examines the nature of these impacts and the ways in which the city’s authorities have attempted to address them. There are lots of little ‘nuggets’ of information that students will find useful for examination answers that go beyond the usual well-documented case studies.

**Rural rebranding: a case study from Shropshire**

At first glance, this article may appear to have little relevance to the AQA specification, dealing as it does with the concept of rebranding in a rural area. However, some teachers and their students who have chosen to examine an area of rural settlement as one of their settlement case studies for the AS core topic Population change may find it useful. The emphasis is on the small market towns of Ludlow and Wem but the issues that they face are mirrored in smaller communities in similar areas.

**Practical geography Rivers fieldwork: using the Bradshaw model**

Students and teachers of each of AS Unit 2 and A2 Unit 4A will find this Practical geography interesting and valuable. It is a fact that the great majority of fieldwork activities undertaken by
students both at AS and at A2 are river-based, and more often than not they are testing one or more elements of the ‘Bradshaw model’.

A concern among A-level examiners is the degree to which teachers and students appreciate the difficulty, nay impossibility, of achieving the same outcomes as the Bradshaw model based on a single day’s fieldwork on a short stretch of river that is in a relatively low-flow state (a necessity for health and safety reasons). These restrictions mean that much of the AS fieldwork undertaken moves little beyond that done at GCSE. Even at A2 fieldwork may not be much more sophisticated than this...but the questions about fieldwork on the paper Geo4A are much more challenging and evaluative.

At A2, students are required to evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of their fieldwork experience and to assess whether what they set out to find out is evident from their results. It is common for candidates to say that their work ‘supports the Bradshaw model’ when it cannot possibly do so. David Holmes provides some useful guidance and advice on this important matter which will assist greatly in the making of meaningful statements regarding ‘evaluation’. It is important that students (and their teachers) critically question what they have done — methods and outcomes — in the context of the geographical theories that underpin their work.

Why is there horsemeat in our food?

All readers of this magazine should find this article of interest — after all it is about the food we all eat. However, it will be of specific interest to students of the AS human option Food issues, and in particular those sections dealing with the management of food supply and the changes taking place in demand. It is also applicable to the study of the role of TNCs in food supply.

Professor Atkins points out that the recent scandal over horsemeat in burgers and other products is just another of many food scandals that have taken place in this country and elsewhere over more than 100 years. He offers six reasons why such scandals have arisen, with particular reference to the UK. Some suggestions about how national diets can be improved are offered. With the growing problem of obesity at all ages, it would seem that this is one issue that has to be addressed sooner than later. But, as with all such issues, debate and argument come to the fore. At the time of writing there are pressures to enforce a greater uptake of school dinners, and yet this may seem to clash with other basic rights such as freedom of choice and association — certainly food for thought.

**Snapshot When the rain hits the ground: runoff, flooding and erosion**

This ‘Snapshot’ provides a brief resume of the main theory (formulated by Horton in the 1930s) as to how and why surface runoff occurs in a rural drainage basin within the British Isles. Standard terminology referred to in a drainage basin context is used to good effect, and hence this little piece will be useful for all students of the AS course, often beginning their A-level geography studies with work on the hydrological cycle and water balance. It is always useful for students to have a well-illustrated example of a fundamental geomorphological theory.