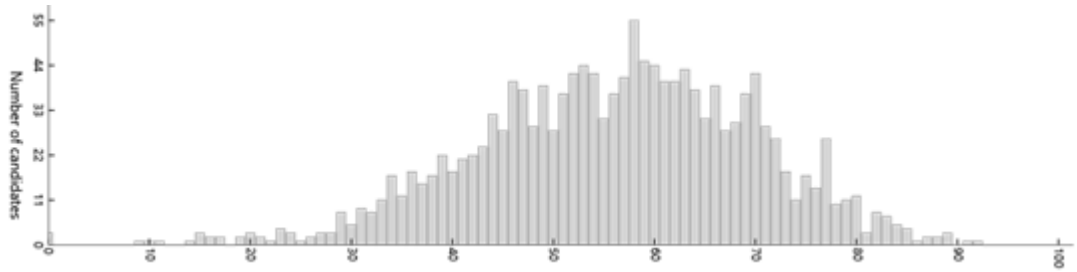
Summary report of the 2021 ATAR course examination report: Geography

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2021	1496	36
2020	1531	29
2019	1563	25
2018	1692	30

The number of candidates sitting and the number attempting each section of the examination can differ as a result of non-attempts across sections of the examination.

Examination score distribution–Written



Summary

Attempted by 1496 candidates	Mean 55.71%	Max 92.00%	Min 0.00%
Section means were:			
Section One: Multiple-choice	Mean 77.98%		
Attempted by 1496 candidates	Mean 15.60(/20)	Max 20.00	Min 0.00
Section Two: Short response	Mean 54.09%		
Attempted by 1492 candidates	Mean 21.64(/40)	Max 38.00	Min 0.00
Section Three: Extended response: Part A: Unit 3	Mean 46.29%		
Attempted by 1462 candidates	Mean 9.26(/20)	Max 20.00	Min 0.00
Section Three: Extended response: Part B: Unit 4	Mean 46.11%		
Attempted by 1461 candidates	Mean 9.22(/20)	Max 20.00	Min 0.00

General comments

The overall mean score for 2021 was marginally lower than that for 2020 (by 0.89%). However, it is pleasing to note that the maximum score of 92% was higher than that recorded in 2020 and that at least some candidates obtained full marks in three of the four sections of the examination, as opposed to two out of four in 2020. This would indicate that the paper was structured in a manner that allowed full marks to be obtained. Furthermore, the difference in mean scores between Section Three Extended response Part A and Part B was only 0.18%. This would indicate both that the paper was well balanced, with questions of equal complexity in the optional questions section of the paper, and it enable completion within the three-hour time limit. It would appear that teachers are reinforcing – and candidates are heeding – the importance of the suggested working times provided on page 2 of the Question/Answer booklet.

An interstate topographical map, at a scale of 1:50 000, and three vertical aerial photographs of various scales and timeframes were included on Side 1 the broadsheet. This removed any perception of bias inherent in the use of Western Australian examples and did not appear to cause any problems for the candidates. Side 2 of the broadsheet contained sources depicting compound graphs, bar graphs, proportional maps and dot distribution maps at global, regional and national scales.

Advice for candidates

- Attention to detail is essential when ascertaining the third and sixth digits of grid references when using these to indicate the location of features.
- The application of simple mathematical calculations to determine gradients, differences in scales, distance and speed/time data are required when interpreting topographic maps and photographs. Mastery of these skills is essential.
- Determining heights and landforms from contour lines plus the relationship between landforms and land uses are skills that need attention.
- In the Short answer section, the number of lines allocated for your answers is proportionate to the number of marks allocated for that question.
- Pay particular attention to the verbs used in the questions (such as, describe, explain, assess, evaluate) and ensure that you understand the meaning of each.
- Read the entire question before planning your answer. Do not seize on a particular term, for example, 'land cover restoration' or 'strategy to address a challenge' and simply write everything that you know about it.
- If possible, leave time to check your answers for obvious mistakes.
- Unless you are specifically asked to do so in a question, do not spend/waste large amounts of time defining the geographical terms used therein.

Advice for teachers

- Stress the points in 'advice for candidates' above to your students.
- The interpretation of contour lines to determine height, slope, landforms and their relationship to land uses is an area requiring further attention.
- Ongoing practice and application of simple mathematical calculations to determine gradients, differences in scales, distance and speed/time data is required.
- Ensure that your students know the differences between the verbs that are commonly used in the questions and defined in the *Glossary of key words used in the formation of questions* found on the ATAR course page on the website.
- Ensure that your students understand all the terms used in the syllabus dot points, particularly where factors influencing impacts or distributions are listed.
- Whilst many case studies and site visits provide students with largely positive and successful illustrations of land cover restoration and of urban and regional management, it is also desirable that students are made aware of any shortcomings and limitations of these initiatives and of ways in which they might be improved. This is important given that the syllabus, and therefore the examination questions, can require candidates to evaluate, assess or discuss these initiatives and strategies or even to compare them.
- Teachers are advised to keep up to date with relevant strategies that are being applied to the various issues found across the course.

Comments on specific sections and questions

Section One: Multiple-choice (20 Marks)

The mean scores for Section One increased from 75.60% in 2020 to 77.98% in 2021. Questions 1 to 12 were based on the topographic map and/or the interpretation of aerial and ground photographs. Questions 13 to 16 were based on Unit 3, with two of these being source based, while Questions 17 to 20 were based on Unit 4, with two being source based.

Most of the aspects of map and graph interpretation examined in this section were handled well though a number of candidates still have problems in handling quantitative data including altitude, distance, gradient and scale.

Section Two: Short response (20 Marks)
In this section, Questions 21 to 25 were based on mapping skills and photographic interpretation, while Questions 26 to 28 were based on Unit 3, with one being source based. Questions 29 to 31 were based on Unit 4, with two being source based. The mean score for this section fell from 57.17% in 2020 to 54.09% in 2021. Candidates performed poorly in both Questions 28 and 30 and, to a lesser extent, Question 22. For all three questions, the mean was below 50%. For Questions 28 and 30, the candidates' deficiencies mainly stemmed from their lack of familiarity and understanding of some of the terms and concepts found in the syllabus and therefore in the questions themselves. Even if they possessed the geographical knowledge to answer these questions correctly, they were unable to present this information in a coherent manner in their answers.

Section Three: Extended response: Part A: Unit 3 (20 Marks)
The mean marks for Section Three Part A fell by 1.47% from 47.76% in 2020 to 46.29% in 2021. The candidates' selection between the two questions, 892 versus 570 candidates, was greater than that in 2020 (796 versus 705) but less extreme than it has been in previous years. Although the mean marks for both questions were below 50%, overall Question 33 was answered a little better than Question 32. Candidates selecting the option of biodiversity loss rather than that of climate change are growing in number but remain in the minority.

Section Three: Extended response: Part B: Unit 4 (20 Marks)
The mean score for Section Three Part B was 46.11%, an increase of 0.81% from 2020 (45.30%). The candidates' selection between the two optional questions was 1124 versus 337. Both questions had components focused on 'Perth or a regional urban centre in Western Australia' and 'a megacity'; therefore, candidates made choices on the details of the questions rather than their broad themes. Candidates' responses to questions on a megacity scored higher than similar questions relating to Perth or a regional urban centre in Western Australia.