

SYLLABUSES AND QUESTIONS IN GEOGRAPHY

No syllabuses in Geography make specific reference to the Commonwealth. A study can be included in one of two ways, either (a) where there is study of a country which is a member of the Commonwealth, or (b) where there is study of a theme or topic which is, or can be, exemplified by study of a Commonwealth country. It is probably easiest to look at the syllabuses in these two groups. (Though we cannot establish this comment by giving dates for the introduction of these syllabuses, it is the case that the approach to Geography illustrated by the papers in Group B is the approach which is currently being developed in many schools.)

Group A: Syllabuses in Geography with Specific Regional Study

All syllabuses that require a regional study include a study of the British Isles, or areas of the British Isles, as part of the course: none suggests that this study should include the perspective of links between Britain and other countries.

Some syllabuses that require regional studies in addition to the British Isles include Commonwealth countries. Others do not. For example the Welsh Board, Section D, asks for the study of one of three areas: (a) USA east of the Rockies; (b) USSR west of the Urals; (c) Norway, Sweden, Denmark, West Germany, Switzerland and Italy.

Table 4: Papers Specifying Commonwealth
Countries for Regional Study

AEB Paper III	Area Studies, options include North America
Cambridge 261 Paper 2	Regional Geography, options include North America and Tropical Africa south of the Sahara (excluding S. Africa)
London Syllabus B	Options include North America
Oxford O45	Regional options include Canada and the West Indies, and Monsoon Asia
Oxford O46	Regional includes Canada and either Africa south of the Sahara, or Australia and New Zealand

Questions from Syllabuses listed in Table 4

Often questions in regional geography rely heavily on factual recall, but by

selecting subject matter with some imagination it is possible to highlight topics of some relevance and lead candidates from the limits of too particular a study.

Cambridge 261, Paper 2, q. 19:
For one country of Tropical Africa :

- (a) Name, locate and describe the traditional native industries and explain the advantages of the region for their development.
- (b) On a sketch-map name and locate:
 - (i) modern manufacturing industries which have been developed;
 - (ii) sources of raw materials, fuel and power;
 - (iii) communications serving the industry.
- (c) Explain the advantages and disadvantages of the country for industrial expansion.

The next question on the same paper shows that within traditional regional study it is possible to introduce a thematic approach.

Cambridge 261, Paper 2, q. 20:
Three major problems of Tropical Africa are: (i) rapid population growth, (ii) rapid urban expansion, (iii) the need to improve communications in order to encourage economic development and manufacturing. Select one country and discuss each of these problems and solutions which may be possible.

Questions can be set which enable the better candidates to develop ideas that relate to important issues with wide implications in the areas studied.

Oxford O45, Paper 11, q. 18:

- (a) Two-thirds of Jamaica's exports by value are bauxite and alumina, but little more than 40% of the bauxite mined is converted into alumina in Jamaica. Why is this so?
- (b) Each of the Windward Islands depends on the export of one or two agricultural products. Comment on this.
- (c) Why do many Puerto Ricans live in New York?

Though the next example from this group was related to a country often excluded in O level regional syllabuses - and should be excluded from this review by the terms of reference - it is a good illustration of how subject matter often avoided in school syllabuses can be introduced into the examination.

Oxford O46, q. 14:

About 70% of the people of the Republic of South Africa are Bantus, 18% are Europeans, 9% Coloureds and 3% Asians. Discuss the distribution of each of these groups within the Republic and their main occupations.

To summarize, it would seem that in papers which ask questions on regional or area studies, the Commonwealth country most frequently found (apart from the British Isles) is Canada. Other countries are no doubt selected because of the link with the United Kingdom, (e.g. "Africa south of the Sahara..") but the reason for this link is never stated or referred to. Most of the questions asked are for factual recall of information thought important by geographers. (None of these questions has been illustrated above.) But there are examples of questions set on regional study which do go beyond this first step of recall and look at issues of importance. If this can be done for some

topics, then it should be possible to introduce other themes, such as the concept of the Commonwealth, to these papers.

Group B: Syllabuses that Require a Study of Themes or Topics

As an alternative to the attempt to study "the total regional geography" of a country or area, many geographers are now concentrating on a few themes within the study of Geography. These themes are then related to particular areas. Sometimes this approach narrows the range of countries or regions studied as it is argued that a few studies in depth are of greater benefit than wider, superficial cover. (This limitation of areas is shown in the Cambridge paper 269, where six themes are spread across two papers with four of the sections specifying that the theme of that section should be studied in relation to Britain.) The areas to be studied to exemplify the themes of study are either stated by the Board or selected by the teacher.

Table 5: Papers Specifying Commonwealth
Countries to Illustrate General Themes or Topics

London, Syllabus A	The Developed World (to include Canada and Australia) and The Less Developed World (to include Africa, Caribbean, South and Southeast Asia). (N.B. common themes to be studied in both groups of countries)
Ox. & Camb.	Topics related to areas are changed each year, but some Commonwealth countries are included.
Welsh	One section relates to problems of settlement and economic development of one area - options include Africa, south of the Sahara (excluding South Africa), or India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Questions from Syllabuses listed in Table 5

Very few questions in O level Geography papers bring together knowledge of countries from different regions or continents or groupings, such as the developed and less developed countries, and this may create difficulties for introducing questions with a Commonwealth perspective. However, some questions point a way forward. Here is an example.

London Syllabus A, Paper 2, q. 5:

(a) For one region of the Developed World account for the development and growth of one of the following industries: petro-chemical production; motor-vehicle assembly; ship-building.

(b) Briefly explain why the industries listed in (a) above have not been important in the countries of the Less Developed world.

Though examiners are no doubt aware of the danger, it is obviously very easy to slip into the trap of always framing questions on less developed countries in such a way that the candidate never gets beyond the stage of

of identifying problems. Here are two questions which move some way away from this danger.

London Syllabus A, Paper 2, q. 8 and q. 9:

(a) Name and locate one area in the Less Developed World which has developed an iron and steel industry.

(b) Describe, with the aid of a sketch-map, the development that has taken place in the area you named in (a).

(c) Comment on the other industries that were necessary to facilitate this development and those which have arisen as a result of the development.

(a) What problems affect agriculture in the tropics?

(b) Describe the improvements in agriculture that are taking place in one named country in the Less Developed World.

Though the next question on this paper again stressed problems, it did so in a way that would cause the candidates to consider these problems in a positive way.

London Syllabus A, Paper 2, q. 10:

Study the information below which refers to a country in the Less Developed World:

Population	40 million
Birth rate	47 per thousand
Death rate	15 per thousand
Largest city	1,400,000
Second largest city	500,000
Agricultural workers	over 60% of population
Cultivated land	30% of total area
Average farm size	3.2 hectares
Daily newspapers	17.5 per thousand people
per capita share of G.N.P.	£80 per annum

(a) What problems do the figures suggest are facing less developed countries?

(b) Explain why these problems exist.

(c) Suggest three other statistical measurements that might have been included to indicate that the country is in the Less Developed World.

This same positive approach is shown in a question from another Board and which required a quite different type of answer.

Welsh, q. 15:

(a) Describe those aspects of either India or Pakistan which suggest to you that those countries are part of the poor Third World.

(b) With reference to either India or Pakistan show what has been achieved in both agriculture and manufacturing industry to promote economic development.

Finally in this group is a question which tested something of the creative thinking of the candidate and illustrates how a topic can be approached so that it could apply to any country.

Welsh, q. E 13:

With specific reference to either East Africa or West Africa describe the importance of water from the viewpoints of: (a) domestic water

supply, (b) rainfall and agriculture, (c) rivers and power production, (d) water for transport.

Table 6: Papers Not Specifying Particular Countries
to Illustrate a General Theme or Topic

AE B Section A	Problems of population growth, water resources, tropical agriculture, and the environment, which should use examples from any part of the world.
Cambridge 269	World Population and World Agriculture to be studied by sample areas.
JMB Syllabus A	Paper II, General Geography with varied topics designed to show general principles illustrated by specific examples.
JMB Syllabus B	Paper II, Study of the uneven distribution of population with reference to specific studies. Themes include - developed and under-developed countries, communist and capitalist economic systems, and the interdependence of different regions.
Ox. & Camb. Revised Syllabus	Paper II, the topics of agriculture, industry and cities in the Developed World (EEC, USA, USSR) and agriculture, industry and population in the Less Developed World.

Though the Regulations for 1977 do not refer to a Revised Syllabus, there were papers set for the Old and the Revised syllabuses.

Questions from Syllabuses listed in Table 6

Whereas the syllabuses referred to so far have all expected candidates to have studied the geography of some Commonwealth countries to enable them to illustrate their answers by case studies from these countries, the syllabuses in this third group do not specify which countries should be studied. It does seem, however, from the questions actually set that it would have been possible to answer the questions having made a study of selected Commonwealth countries.

As in the previous group of papers there was a question which brought together the study of countries from contrasting economic backgrounds.

AE B, Section A, q. 2

Study the following table which refers to the production of cereals in India and France in 1972.

	India		France	
	Area under crop in 000 hectares	Production in 000 metric tons	Area under crop in 000 hectares	Production in 000 metric tons
Cereal				
Wheat	19,139	26,410	3,958	18,123
Barley	2,456	2,577	2,674	10,426
Maize	5,726	6,206	1,880	8,190
Rice	36,019	57,950	10	41

- (a) State three significant facts that can be learned from these figures.
- (b) Why do many Developing Countries have problems in growing enough cereals to feed their population?
- (c) (i) Name one scheme to increase food production in a Developing Country
(ii) Draw a map to show the location of the area concerned in this scheme.
(iii) Describe carefully how it is hoped that this scheme will increase food production.

As in the first group of syllabuses there was a question that not only asked for knowledge of a country but also enabled candidates to write on an issue of some importance to that country.

AE B, Section A, q. 6

- (a) (i) Name one tropical country in which a single agricultural product accounts for most of the value of its exports. Name this product.
(ii) Draw a sketch-map of the country to show the main producing areas for this product and the main exporting routes; name at least three towns.
- (b) What conditions influence the production of this crop in the country you have named?
- (c) What disadvantages result from this reliance on a single export crop?

Finally, there were two questions which raised issues not illustrated in the questions quoted so far and which gave the candidates the opportunity of discussing issues of great importance.

Ox. & Camb. (Revised Syllabus) Paper II, q. 10 and q.12

Small-scale manufacturing industries are the most typical form of industrial development in many developing countries because, although there is no shortage of labour, the amount of capital available for industrial development is usually very limited

With these two factors in mind, and using examples which you have studied:

- (a) Describe the materials used, processes and products in one such manufacturing activity.
- (b) Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of low capital - high labour pattern of industrial activity in one country or region.
- (c) Explain how these two factors have affected the development of heavy industry in one country or region.

The photograph is of a shanty town on the outskirts of a large

tropical city.

(a) Describe the conditions shown in the photograph and suggest reasons for the existence of such "towns".

(b) What impression does the photograph convey about social, health, and economic problems which are likely to occur?

(c) What might be done to improve living standards for the people in this shanty town?

CONCLUSIONS

Our main conclusions can be summarized in these four points:

1. The Commonwealth as such does not appear to be a priority for study in the minds of English examiners in History and Geography. Indeed it is of peripheral, and probably diminishing interest. This outlook appears to be shared by school teachers, since the number of entries to such papers in Commonwealth history that do exist are few.
2. Where the Commonwealth is taught in History, it is seen largely as part of British history rather than as an international organization of significance comparable to the OAU or NATO. In the field of Geography it is probably the great breadth of membership of the Commonwealth that makes it less easy to accommodate in syllabuses than the international organizations of more limited membership such as the EEC.
3. However, despite the above, it seems clear that the Empire and Commonwealth still exert an appreciable influence on the construction of syllabuses and examination questions. Although there is little conscious attempt to foster an awareness of a Commonwealth relationship per se, overseas areas and personalities are included for study which may well not have been there except for their historical connections with Britain. Yet, as a corollary of this, it appears that most examiners view the Commonwealth, if they are conscious of it at all, as an historical phenomenon, rather than as an important organization in the contemporary world.
4. Syllabuses in history and geography are changing and it could well be that the Commonwealth could be included as an identifiable part of these syllabuses. For this to happen, however, would need a marked change of awareness of the nature of the Commonwealth and its past and present links with the United Kingdom.