



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY  
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

# **Assessment Report**

## **Scholarship, 2006**

### **Geography**

## Commentary

The Scholarship Geography examination paper presented candidates with information about two contexts: Easter Island and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). In the case of Easter Island the resource had an historical geography theme – how people settled the island and the events and processes related to this settlement that led to an ecological and population disaster. ANWR was set in the present and looked to the future. The focus of the debate was whether or not the oil resource of this Arctic region of Alaska should be exploited. In both case studies issues relating to peoples' use of the natural environment and natural resources was a central theme. Past, present and future were linked through the two contexts by the question of whether events of the past (like on Easter Island) have relevance to the present and future (for example ANWR) when resource use is being considered.

In keeping with the Scholarship Geography Performance Standard, the examination format is based on a context for which resources are provided to the candidate. The examination does not seek to examine the specific content associated with the Year 13 course of study in Geography.

Candidates and teachers have, over the past two years since the introduction of scholarship as a stand alone award, become more familiar with the requirements of Scholarship Geography and the likely format and nature of the examination paper. The more explicit examination specifications and the publication of the 'Format of the 2006 Assessment in Scholarship Geography' circular (August 7<sup>th</sup> 2006) have also helped candidates and teachers become familiar with the broad format and requirements of the exam paper.

It is clear from the marking of candidate answers that there is high quality teaching taking place that equip candidates to tackle the scholarship exam. There are many candidates entering the exam who are both superb students and excellent geographers. The best scripts stand out and are a pleasure to read and to mark. About one third of the answer papers showed candidates have a real understanding of both geography and of the examination paper requirements. These candidates through their intellect, and geography knowledge and understanding, were able to tackle the exam questions with confidence and produce very successful answers to all three questions. Another one third of the exam scripts contained answers from candidates who were clearly giving the exam their very best efforts and produced either three competent answers or one or two very good answers with one weaker answer. The final group of candidates found the paper too demanding and produced weak answers to all questions or write one answer or a part answer, but failed to complete the rest of the paper.

The paper requires the candidate to read, understand and process of a lot of resource material before they began to answer the questions. Few papers appeared incomplete because of time running out. Time management in such an exam situation is an important skill and candidates seem to have mastered this.

The amount of space provided in the answer booklet was intended to give an indication of the maximum length of the answer required. A focused brief answer tended to score highly. In many instances candidates spoilt their answer by writing at great length: they had provided a high quality answer in the first part of their writing but went on to fill all the pages in the answer booklet. This lengthy response detracted from the overall mark they were awarded because the answer had lost its focus. The answer became one that appeared to be covering all possible bases without it being clear that the question had been clearly understood and answered.

Some of the most pleasing responses saw candidates include geographic ideas (syllabus IGI's) and more general geographic concepts in their answers. Better candidates used the IGIs and geographic concepts in a way that supported the answer and blended into the answer in a natural way. These candidates showed an understanding of geography through a confident answer. For the first time in the Geography Scholarship examination candidates were given the opportunity

(Question 3) to include knowledge and ideas from ‘their studies in geography’ as well as material from the resource booklet in their answers. This resulted in some excellent content being included in the answers to this question that gave real breadth to the critical evaluation. It was a feature of the top candidates who included this ‘extra information’ in ways that blended into their answer and maintained the flow of their response.

**As a final comment:** the best candidates in Geography Scholarship are familiar with the detail of the performance standard and with the exam assessment specifications. Understanding the meaning of the performance standard descriptors and of the explanatory notes requires careful analysis and then practice. Where candidates have had the chance to discuss and answer practice questions based on new and unfamiliar contexts, they come to the exam well prepared and confident. These are the candidates who produce the top answers. Practice answering under a time limitation and considering how to best use three hours of exam time is also a good exam preparation technique.

**The best performing candidates most commonly demonstrated the following skills and/or knowledge:**

- were able to assimilate and quickly understand the overall geographical theme (context and setting) of the material provided in the resource booklet
- were confident and competent geographers with a broad knowledge of geographical ideas, approaches to geography and geographic skills – they see the world through the eyes of a geographer
- demonstrated a good understanding of how to critically evaluate, and of how perspectives shape and influence the views and opinions people and groups have about events, issues and questions
- demonstrated an ability to select relevant information and incorporate it into answers where appropriate
- were able to generalise and to support generalisations with specific examples related to the context
- demonstrated a good ‘general’ geographic knowledge and the ability to select and incorporate this knowledge into answers where it is relevant
- skilled and confident readers and writers who demonstrated an understanding of the meaning and nuances of the questions and could answer in an articulate, logical and convincing manner
- demonstrated effective time skills (and a plan for the exam) to read the resource materials, gain an overview and select important details and write full answers to all questions
- developed answers where they were able to discriminate on the information and ideas to include – they were discerning about the information to select and include.

**Features of successful answers:**

**Question 1a –**

- provided a diagram that had logical links from event to event that ended up ‘explaining’ why the ecological disaster and population crash on Easter Island came about
- contained some specific Easter Island detail to support the general ideas included – for example that food shortages were associated with collapse of fish supplies when the timber to build canoes ran out
- included the loss of trees (deforestation) as a key reason for the collapse and showed this as a central feature of the diagram.

**Question 1b –**

- chose two events/activities/processes that interacted in a way that could be explained in a simple and convincing manner. These answers showed candidates who had a clear grasp of both the meaning of ‘interaction’ and of the events on Easter Island. POPULATION GROWTH interacting with DEFORESTATION was one example that worked well.

*As population increased trees were cut for a variety of reasons ..... however in the end with all the trees gone food supplies plummeted because of soil loss on the farmlands and lack of fish because no more canoes could be made .....,*

FARMING and ENVIRONMENT CHANGE, ANCESTOR WORSHIP and DEFORESTATION, CIVIL WAR and FOOD SHORTAGE were also often linked with success.

### **Question 2 –**

The best answers were ones where candidates recognized that differences of opinion about whether ANWR should be opened up for oil exploitation exist, and it is these differences of opinion that make the proposal controversial. Many successful answers recognised the clash between conservation priority views and economic priority views - the best candidates discussed the ANWR proposal recognizing and explaining the economic perspective driving one set of views in contrast to opposing ecology/conservation perspective and lobby. Other features of successful answers:

- recognized and discussed the different views amongst Alaskan people themselves – especially the different attitudes of the two indigenous Native American groups, the Gwich'in and the Inupiat and the reasons for these differences
- grouped, discussed and compared perspectives and views that stemmed from inside and outside of Alaska
- referred to, and used the resource materials, in ways that supported the answer with specific detail – eg. Statistics from the Kaktovik ANWR survey; the perspective (and possible bias) lying behind the AEEG letter and the NRDC map on pages 12 and 13 of the resource booklet.

### **Question 3 –**

In this question the best answers were ones where candidates understood the requirements of the instruction to 'critically evaluate'. This required evidence to be weighed up, validity to be assessed and judgements to be made. Candidates could make a case to support or reject the statement. Candidates who gained high marks for this question discussed and argued both sides before coming to a final conclusion and judgement. The top answers included a visual (as required by the question instructions) that was incorporated into the answer and referred to in the written part of the answer. The best visuals were 'originals' because there were no visuals provided in the resource booklet that lent themselves to direct copy in support of this answer. One of the most successful visuals was a graph showing 'change over time' eg. Population change and resource depletion either on Easter Island or in a theoretical way.

### **Three further features of top answers:**

- included and discussed case studies from beyond the resource booklet material that had a resource use and learning from the past theme to them eg. Developments in Amazonia, China's Three Gorges Dam, power scheme development and proposals (HEP and wind farms) in New Zealand, deforestation in the foothills of Nepal, issues relating to global warming
- considered, discussed and critiqued the alternative views of Jared Diamond and Gregg Easterbrook about the relevance of the past to the present (resource booklet pages 6 and 7)
- included discussion of the benefits to people and society arising from resource use both in the past and today as well as the costs associated with such use.

### **Candidates who did NOT achieve scholarship lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:**

- did not attempt all three questions
- did not show understanding of the overall theme and case study information – they had a lot of detail but had no framework on which to hang it
- did not understand key question command words like 'interaction', 'perspectives', 'critically evaluate'
- presented 'pre-prepared' content connected with diagrams, perspectives, geographic ideas and Maori concepts and included these in answers in a non-selective and contrived way –this detracted from the answer rather than added to it

- included diagrams that were irrelevant and/or did not refer to the diagrams in the body of the answer
- used very lengthy read-offs from the resource materials provided.

**Features of less successful answers:**

**Question 1a –**

- created a diagram that listed all the geographic ideas from the syllabus document (Systems, Processes, Culture and Perception, Change etc.) and tried to link these with or without reference to the Easter Island events
- drew a diagram that contained big ideas like “Human Environment and Natural Environment links and interaction” without adding any Easter Island examples or events specific to Easter Island at all
- provided full details of Easter Island events copied without any processing and selection of the key events. Their answer became a rewrite of the resource booklet information with arrows linking everything.

**Question 1b –**

- chose two appropriate events but described and explained the influence of one on the other, but not vice versa
- chose two events where explaining a one-way relationship was straightforward but the two-way interrelationship was difficult to establish; for example ANCESTOR WORSHIP and MOAI CONSTRUCTION.

**Question 2 –**

- wrote at length (and most candidates did write at length on this answer) about pros and cons of ANWR oilfield development, without tackling the reasons why it is a controversial proposal. Often these candidates would give their opinion of whether or not the development should take place – no matter how well the case may have been argued these answers missed the point of the question with resulting low marks for this question
- included a discussion of (different) views and opinions rather than a more in-depth perspectives. What was required was to get behind these views and opinions and discuss why people / groups hold these views and opinions, and the attitude and philosophy that shaped them.

**Question 3 –**

- candidates provided an answer from one side only: usually agreeing with the statement, and presenting the negative outcomes of past resource use using the crash and disasters on Easter Island as the only evidence
- wrote an answer that contained no discussion of Easter Island or ANWR at all, or referred to only one of them.