



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2011**

Geography

GEO4A

(Specification 2030)

Unit 4A: Geography Fieldwork Investigation

Report on the Examination

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General

This was the third examination in this specification in which fieldwork and fieldwork skills were assessed by written examination. It was again pleasing to see the fieldwork preparation that had been carried out by centres and candidates; both are to be commended for their diligence. The best preparation for the paper, as centres recognise, is for candidates to have firsthand experience of fieldwork, including a write-up of the investigation. Centres again demonstrated a variety of approaches to the investigation, including all candidates undertaking the same investigation, varied investigations in small groups and completely individual investigations. Fieldwork on rivers continues to be popular, and, for example, microclimates and settlement studies are well represented. Centres are becoming increasingly confident in preparing candidates for this unit and this is reflected in the greater variety of fieldwork being studied.

40 marks are allocated for the examination of the candidates' own fieldwork investigation, whilst 20 marks are allocated for the assessment of fieldwork related skills.

What was good:

- candidates are increasingly demonstrating they had undertaken fieldwork, developed their investigative skills and are able to demonstrate what they have learned from the fieldwork experience
- specific detail about the fieldwork location, data collection, analysis, results, conclusions and evaluation of these, thus demonstrating with confidence the fieldwork investigation experience
- the great majority of candidates made a clear effort to respond to all sections of the paper
- there was continued evidence of clearly expressed and well-presented argument, couched in geographically appropriate terminology, demonstrating that a number of candidates are able to 'think like a geographer'.

What needs further development:

- there is still the need for some candidates to recognise, understand and respond appropriately to the command words. Explain, evaluate, justify, assess are examples of command words that trigger access to the higher mark bands
- it is still apparent that some centres are permitting candidates to select a very generalised aim. This, if not refined by relevant focused sub-aims, may cause the investigation to lack a clear focus; such candidates do not always have the resources to respond in a focused manner to the questions set.
- the consistent application of detailed knowledge of the fieldwork undertaken to move from the implicit to the explicit to access the higher mark bands
- familiarity with all skills listed in the specification.

Question 1 (a)

This question was answered well with most candidates accessing Level 2. Candidates were able to outline the fieldwork undertaken, but many were less confident in explaining the relevance of the data collection to the aims. Most candidates were able to make a passing reference to this link, however. The best candidates were able to refer convincingly to their fieldwork experience. Most candidates had the freedom and confidence to adapt their knowledge to the question set rather than using a prepared response. A small number of candidates included a sketch map or diagram to aid their explanation.

Question 1 (b)

The responses to this question were commendable. The great majority of candidates were able to comment on the effectiveness of their method of data collection, but not all were able to evaluate in any depth, tending to focus on a list of strengths and weaknesses. Thus most candidates were able to access Level 2. Again, the best candidates were able to refer with increasing confidence to their experience in the field.

Question 2

A number of techniques of data analysis were described by the candidates; Spearman's Rank, chi squared, standard deviation and Mann Whitney were popular. However, a significant number of candidates used graphical techniques which did not specifically analyse data, though credit was given where candidates showed how the technique was used to aid analysis and justified its inclusion in the fieldwork. A scatter graph was the most common alternative technique, though it was frequently covered in conjunction with Spearman. There were some detailed descriptions of techniques of analysis with better candidates justifying the inclusion in their fieldwork. The better candidates were able to describe the working of the technique, interpreted the result, with reference to significance, thus justifying its inclusion in the fieldwork investigation.

Question 3

The responses to this question were encouragingly and consistently good and candidates were able to competently assess the usefulness of their investigation. There are many ways in which the usefulness of the investigation could be assessed, including results, methods/limitations, the overall success of the investigation, the location, improvements and extensions, amongst others. This flexible approach enabled candidates to really show their understanding of what they had learned from the investigation process. Again the better candidates related their answer clearly to their experiences, used detail in support and linked their responses to other elements of the subject, thus demonstrating synopticity and being able to 'think like a geographer'..

Question 4 (a)

The opportunity to respond to a question on logarithmic graphs was not anticipated by all candidates, but most were able to offer some explanation and attain level 2. Candidates' responses tended to focus on a reduced scale to show large ranges of data. Fewer were able to comment on the trends that were shown, particularly on Figure 1(b), with implications for the comparison of the gradient of the lines shown, i.e. the steeper the line, the faster the rate of change. Most were able to refer to some detail from the figures, showing an encouraging ability to respond to the stimulus provided, but were unable to develop their response with any previous knowledge of the skill.

Centres are reminded that this section can refer to any of the skills from the list in the specification.

Question 4 (b)

Most candidates showed sound knowledge of graphical techniques, though a significant number did drift into mapping skills and techniques of analysis. There was usually a good range of techniques identified, although explanation was not always well expressed. Again the importance of the command word 'explain' as a trigger for discrimination cannot be understated. The importance of using a variety of graphical techniques tended to be less well covered, but the link to geographical understanding was recognised by the majority of candidates.

This question again permitted candidates the opportunity to explore the synoptic elements of the specification and to demonstrate their ability in the subject. It was well taken by an encouraging number.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.