

Version



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Geography

GEO4A

(Specification 2030)

Unit 4A: Geography Fieldwork Investigation

Report on the Examination

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General

This examination assesses both fieldwork and fieldwork skills 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 first-hand experience of fieldwork, including a write-up of the investigation. Centres again demonstrated a variety of approaches to the investigation, the most common being all candidates undertaking the same investigation, whilst varied investigations in small groups and completely individual investigations were also found. Fieldwork on rivers continues to be the most popular, and, in addition, coasts, sand dunes, microclimates and settlement studies are represented. Centres appear increasingly confident in preparing candidates for this unit.

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 continue to demonstrate they had undertaken fieldwork, developed their investigative skills and are confident in applying the fieldwork experience.
- Candidates are able to provide specific detail about the fieldwork location, relevance to the underpinning theory, detail on data collection, analysis, results, conclusions and evaluation/extension of these, thus demonstrating with confidence what they have learned from the fieldwork investigation.
- Candidates are increasingly selecting a focused aim, enabling a focused response to the questions set.
- The great majority of candidates made a clear effort to respond to all sections of the paper.
- There was a clear improvement in the ability of candidates to respond to the command words in this series, enabling access to the higher mark bands.
- There was continued evidence of clearly expressed and well-presented argument, couched in geographically appropriate terminology, demonstrating that a good number of candidates continue to 'think like a geographer'.
- The application of knowledge in unfamiliar contexts was demonstrated by a competent interpretation of statistical skills in Section B. Centres are reminded that this section can refer to any of the skills from the list in the specification.

What needs further development

- There is still the need for a very small number of candidates to recognise, understand and respond appropriately to the command words. Explain, evaluate, justify, assess and comment on are examples of command words that trigger access to the higher mark bands.
- There is the need for candidates to be fully aware of **all** skills for this paper, including Mann Whitney U Test.
- The consistent application of detailed knowledge of the fieldwork undertaken to move from the implicit to the explicit to consistently access the higher mark bands.
- There was increasing evidence of candidates using set answers prepared in advance of the examination. Using past questions would be expected to be part of a revision programme, but candidates must be able to adapt the material to the actual question set, which is likely to require an adaptation of the existing knowledge.

Question 1

This question was answered well with most candidates accessing Level 2 and a good number Level 3. The majority of candidates were able to suggest a range of geographical reasons for the choice of their fieldwork, but were not always able to explain the reason and apply specific knowledge about the area chosen. Most candidates focused on accessibility, safety or location to the centre, theory and some of the characteristics of the area selected. The best candidates were able to refer convincingly to their fieldwork experience. Fewer candidates than in previous examination series appeared confident to adapt their knowledge to the question set, rather than over-rely on prepared responses and thus, access the highest mark band. A small number of candidates included a sketch map or diagram to aid their explanation. Such diagrams are welcome and should be made relevant to the question by focused use of annotation.

Question 2

There were some good responses with good awareness of risk assessment. Candidates were able to describe a number of risks, with good supporting evidence of steps taken to minimise these risks. However, many candidates were unable to justify the measures taken by referring to the risk outcomes that needed to be avoided. Again, the best candidates were able to refer with confidence to their experience in the field.

Question 3

Most candidates were able to identify an appropriate method of data presentation. A very small minority selected a method of analysis. The great majority of candidates were focused on the need to assess the usefulness of the method selected in the fieldwork investigation, including reference to strengths **and** weaknesses and alternative methods. Thus they were able to access Level 2 or Level 3. Scattergraphs were the most frequent method used. The best candidates were able to refer to their experience in the field and there was a pleasing number of responses that accessed Level 3, demonstrating excellent geographical knowledge.

Question 4

The great majority of candidates responded well to this question. Candidates were able to demonstrate a link between theory and their understanding achieved by undertaking the investigation. A good number of candidates thus related their answer clearly to their fieldwork experiences, used detail in support and were able to demonstrate synopticity (defined here as being able to 'think like a geographer'). The requirement to 'discuss' was a good discriminator.

Question 5 (a)

The question on Mann Whitley U Test demonstrated the need for candidates to be prepared to respond to a question on any of the skills listed as part of the 'skills checklist' in the specification. Candidates, therefore, either had a good knowledge of the skill and gained full marks or did not. Many lacked a clear understanding of the workings of the test, particularly the use of the U values in relation to significance and the acceptance/rejection of the null hypothesis. As a result, a number of candidates made incorrect decisions when interpreting the values. Candidates possessing a sound knowledge/understanding of the test were also able to comment on the chance factor.

Question 5 (b)

Again, many candidates were well prepared and were able to suggest why the test is suitable. However, for many, a working knowledge of the reasons why the test was suitable was scant.

Question 5 (c)

Most candidates were well prepared for this question. Almost without exception, candidates were aware of one or more statistical techniques. The most popular were Spearman's rank correlation test, Chi-squared and Mann Whitney U Test, but there was also reference to measures of central tendency. There was competent explanation of the uses of the techniques suggested, with the better candidates making reference to the contribution to their personal geographical knowledge. The best candidates clearly identified more than one technique, kept referring to it, related it to fieldwork and explained how it was appropriate to understanding. It was pleasing to be able to recognise the quality of those who were thinking geographically.