



**General Certificate of Education
June 2011**

Archaeology 2011

ARCH 4 Archaeological Investigation

Report on the Examination

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Unit ARCH4

Archaeological Investigation

General Comments

It is worth noting at the outset that many of the points raised in the 2010 report to assist centres in improving their performance were taken on board resulting in many more studies which linked closely to the format for the Unit in the Specification. Equally the vast majority of the studies were in the region of 4000 words which developed the skills of acquiring, sifting, presenting and evaluating evidence coherently and with precision.

While the key headings allowed structure to the work, teachers also adapted to awarding marks where valid material appeared within the study even if it was in the 'wrong' section. It has been stressed at Teacher Support meetings and Standardisation that the whole of a study needs to be read and mentally assessed before deciding on appropriate levels of attainment and indeed mark location within the noted level.

The AO2 mark links to the rationale, key concepts and practical/ethical considerations. It would be unusual for there to be no practical considerations to reference, but candidates do not need to create ethical problems where none exist in order to qualify for Level 4. More important is the ability to display understanding of the concepts which underpin and are relevant to the topic and to maintain an evaluative approach beyond simply the creation of a working title for the study.

Context sections were noticeably trimmed back in their relationship to Evidence. However, not all candidates made use of the opportunity to conduct a desk-top piece of research and so a summary background of the site/material/period did not necessarily emerge and too often the focused work failed to establish the reality of the archaeological situation into which they were about to explore. Lack of basic understanding at this stage can undermine the key research and any conclusions reached. It is a strong recommendation that teachers monitor the formative research (this should cover site/material availability too – see later advice re Personal Study Outline Forms) so that candidates do not set off on a false tack. Prompts towards appropriate texts or excavation reports rather than vague websites would engender an understanding of the depth and quality of research needed at this level of education.

Candidates should be directed to and encouraged to use easily accessible authoritative works on specific types of evidence or periods e.g. The Defence of Britain Handbook, Clarke's volume on The Archaeology of Airfields, Margary and/or Bagshawe on Roman Roads, English Heritage/Batsford series, to help identify features in the field and enable comparisons with standard typologies. Candidates can also improve their marks for Rationale and/or Context by moving beyond just personal reasons for choice of title, to a more comprehensive explanation of what studies already exist on the data they are examining and how their work relates to such previous studies in terms of slightly different focus, reassessment in the light of new developments or threats and/or additional recording.

If teachers are going to over-reward in their assessments it is likely to be in Evidence. The wording in the assessment grid needs to be interpreted (hence Standardising meetings) and it may help as a rule-of-thumb to observe that upper Level 2 roughly equates to an E Grade at A level and marks at the boundary of Levels 3 and 4 an A grade at A level. Therefore simply adjudging competent and relatively keen activity as meeting such terms as 'depth of first-hand

involvement', 'comprehensive abstraction', 'awareness of relative values', 'sufficient relevant and accurate data', 'thorough recording, effectively presented in the most appropriate formats' (Level 4 descriptors) must be based on hard evidence and not just sympathy for personal graft.

The assessment statements for Evaluation and Conclusion were modified as signalled in the 2010 report and discussed at Teacher Support and Standardising Meetings. Generally this has proved helpful, and further small modifications for 2012 are being considered.

On a positive note, moderators were pleased to observe:

- More balanced studies taking note of the assessment scheme
- focused studies
- teacher uptake of the warnings given (2010) of topics to avoid
- phase plans
- far fewer 'essays'
- much more regular engagement with synopticity (though some still deny this element)
- interesting and well-developed studies based on topics as diverse as: house development; pill-boxes; coins; brooches; experiments with bone flutes and wattle and daub.

Areas for improvement noted from 2011 studies – some new, others perennial:

- Over-reliance on photography where a drawing is a better way of conveying information. The new term for 2011 was 'scaled photography' i.e. a ranging pole is present; in itself this is an appropriate accessory, but it does not overcome the need for further recording
- Considering large public buildings (town halls or cathedrals) capable of 'personal' study
- Some centres credit original thought/interpretation where it is clearly fanciful & unsubstantiated at best – e.g. a study of Avebury in which 4 slightly wider gaps between stones were linked to various key events in the community as a done-deal with no qualification
- Short transcribed interviews with local 'experts'
- Reference to church or castle stone building fabric as 'bricks'
- Belief that aerial photographs of a church are beneficial to understanding phasing
- Classifying 'photos through glass' as a museum study
- Mixed measures – the situation was improving until a wall emerged at '3 metres long by 15 inches wide'
- Google maps/satellite images (which can be valid) increasingly with 'pins' stuck in them
- Excessively long studies – some were double what was needed and one was approx 18000 words
- Spellings of key terms e.g. *aerial*, *metre*, *Domesday*, *hachures*
- Too few examples studied to provide sufficient empirical evidence e.g. gravestones, barrows
- Indication of limited commitment or understanding of what 40% of A2 means e.g. 'one of my two religious buildings was inaccessible', 'I would have liked to study more gravestones' (only 30 were looked at), 'my experiment took nearly a whole day', 'my site is only open on Sundays so I don't know if I can get there'.

Administratively it was noted that the Specification requires a copy of the Personal Study Outline Form to be placed at the front of each study. This should be the one returned to the candidate by the Coursework Adviser or, in the case of centres who do not use this service, a completed form minus the Adviser's comments. It is strongly urged that all candidates use the Coursework Adviser system. It removes the issue of students using inappropriate or non-evaluative questions as their titles and being disappointed at a lesser outcome for their efforts.

Please note that there is a new Coursework Adviser for 2012 and forms should be sent in the first instance to the Archaeology Section, AQA , Manchester.

Overall the enjoyment and hard work of many centres, both teachers and more importantly their candidates, shone through from the studies and ARCH4 continues to set a serious and achievable challenge to which many rise successfully. Long may it continue to do so!

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results statistics** page of the AQA Website.