



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

**Archaeology**

**ARCH4**

**(Specification 2010)**

**ARCH4 Archaeological Investigation**

***Report on the Examination***

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# **Unit ARCH4**

## **Archaeological Investigation**

### **General comments**

As reported in 2011 report, it is encouraging that many of the points raised in the previous year's report to assist schools and colleges in improving their performance were taken on board resulting in most studies being linked closely to the format for the Unit as defined in the Specification. Once again 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. It is possible to achieve the highest marks with studies of this length, and students should continue to be dissuaded from writing at greater length.

Key headings have again allowed structure to the work, and the majority of teachers were adept at awarding marks where material appeared within the study even if it was in a different section. The Teacher Support meetings and Standardisation process have stressed the importance of reading and mentally assessing the study as a whole prior to deciding on appropriate levels of attainment and indeed mark allocation within the noted level.

The Rationale continues to cause some difficulty in its application. In this section students need to be able to demonstrate an understanding of the concepts which underpin and are relevant to their topic, and to maintain an evaluative approach. This goes beyond the creation of a working title for the study. Furthermore, the practical/ethical considerations can cause problems. The practical considerations are fairly straightforward to consider (access, health and safety, available equipment, etc.) but students do not need to create ethical problems where none exist. However, obvious opportunities are lost, particularly with reference to land ownership, issues when working in places of worship and graveyards, and more recent studies, for example World War II sites and monuments where living relatives may still exist.

On the whole the Context section was much better this year, with a great deal of evidence of engagement with HERs, college LRCs, public library collections and relevant internet sites. However, in a significant minority of cases, students still tended to produce an "all I know about" piece, with few references made to the relevance (or not) of the information provided. More importantly, whether students were attempting studies focussed on earthworks or buildings, considering museum collections, or carrying out experiments, there was often a lack of background material on the discipline behind the study. It is worth stressing again that students 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, Coles on Experimental Archaeology, 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. Students should be reminded that books (rather than websites) will usually provide the best background information, although websites can often provide specific up to date information on specific sites. It must be stressed that students need to discriminate between web sites. Site addresses containing ".ac" are often more likely to be reliable, with archaeology gateway sites such as [www.britarch.ac.uk](http://www.britarch.ac.uk) & [www.ahds.ac.uk/archaeology](http://www.ahds.ac.uk/archaeology) providing links to useful resources. Google Scholar provides links to sites that have been properly peer reviewed, but it is understood that not all schools and colleges will have licences in place to access this material. Synoptic links were far more skilfully teased out this year, with students making a focussed link to a particular theme they have studied rather than simply putting "ARCH 3" in brackets.

This year the Evidence section showed even more first-hand engagement with the site and/or topic. Students demonstrated that they were getting into the field and recording/analysing the evidence first-hand. Below are some important pointers regarding this section. The best students (where relevant):

- Put **scale** and **orientation** on drawings and photographs of sites/parts of sites
- **Used** photographs and drawings (i.e. commented upon and annotated them as relevant)
- **Handled** artefacts and collections rather than photographing them through glass
- Assessed both the **inside** and the **outside** of buildings
- Drew phase **plans** and **elevations** of buildings
- Avoided large and well known sites where little personal study would be possible
- Carried out experiments that **answered focussed questions**, and underpinned their methodologies with archaeological evidence

Students continue to come up with topics that cover a range of periods and types of study. Some novel examples from 2012 include:

- An experiment into the characteristics of Roman pigments
- An assessment of the Napoleonic defences of Portsmouth
- The typology of security locks in Georgian houses
- The effects of the Blitz on Battersea

Amongst more familiar studies that covered a range of topics were:

- An assessment of a disused railway in the West Midlands
- An assessment of a large country house in Somerset
- An investigation into the site of a supposed Roman settlement in Somerset

There continue to be areas for improvement. These were noted by the moderating team from 2012 studies – some new, others perennial:

- Over-reliance on photography where a drawing is a better way of conveying information
- Simple survey work on earthworks using tapes, inclinometers and ranging poles seems to be a dying art
- Failure to use photographic evidence through lack of comment and annotation
- Short transcribed interviews with local 'experts' as a substitute for background research. Such interviews are valid where the reliability of the interviewee can be verified i.e. the County Archaeologist rather than an uninitiated enthusiast.
- Poor quality questionnaires
- Only accessing the outside of churches and other buildings
- Classifying 'photos through glass' as a museum study
- Google maps/satellite images (which can be valid) with 'pins' stuck in them. (These can be removed if the "layers" on the menu are un-ticked)
- Excessively long studies – there were fewer this year, but some were double what was needed
- Spellings of key terms e.g. aerial, metre, Domesday, hachures
- An over-emphasis on the student evaluating the merits of their study and how s/he tackled it, rather than drawing conclusions related to the original question. The mark scheme provides for both, but some students underplayed the conclusion element.

The Moderation team noted that where schools and colleges failed to either seek, or act upon, the advice of the Coursework Adviser, their students were more likely to under-achieve, sometimes quite significantly.

Once again, it is **strongly** urged that schools and colleges use the Coursework Adviser system. It will remove the problem of students using inappropriate or non-evaluative

questions as their titles and being disappointed at a poorer outcome for their efforts. It will also help prevent students tackling questions where they cannot possibly carry out any first hand investigation. Furthermore, teachers that fail to do this are doing their students a great disservice.

Students continue to produce innovative, interesting and stimulating studies; the enjoyment and enthusiasm shone through. Moderating them is a pleasure and a privilege.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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

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