



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **Geography 2030**

## *Specification*

### **GEO4A      Geography Fieldwork Investigation**

# **Report on the Examination**

## *2010 examination - January series*

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## General

This was the first examination in this specification in which fieldwork and fieldwork skills were assessed by written examination. It was pleasing to see the preparation that had been carried out by centres and candidates for this examination and centres are to be commended for their diligence. The best preparation for the paper is for candidates to have first hand experience of fieldwork, including a write-up of the investigation. Centres 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 was very popular, but psammoseres, microclimates and settlement studies were well represented.

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 had worked well carrying out fieldwork, developed their investigative skills and were able to demonstrate what they had learned from the fieldwork experience
- candidates provided specific detail about the fieldwork location, data collection, analysis, results, conclusions and evaluation, thus demonstrating with confidence the fieldwork experience
- the great majority of candidates were able to make a clear effort to respond to all sections of the paper and did not appear to have too much nor too little time to show their capabilities
- there was evidence of clearly expressed and well-presented explanations, couched in geographically appropriate language demonstrating that the candidate 'thinks 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 are examples of command words that trigger access to the higher mark bands
- the consistent application of detail on the fieldwork to move from implicit to explicit referencing to access the higher mark bands
- the interpretation of statistical tests
- consistent application of geographical ideas to show that a candidate is able to 'think like a geographer'.

## Question 1

In general, this question was answered well with most candidates accessing Level 2 by responding to the command word. Some centres had obviously a prepared response on aims and so many candidates within centres had similar answers. Although this usually allowed candidates to reach Level 2 it did restrict some candidates from adapting their knowledge to the question, preventing more talented students from accessing the higher marks. Large numbers of candidates based their answer on access and safety with only limited links to aims. The better candidates had a clear aim/ hypothesis and had the freedom and confidence to adapt their knowledge to the question rather than using the prepared response. The best candidates frequently included a sketch map or diagram to aid their explicit, detailed explanation of why the location was relevant to the topic.

## Question 2

In part (a) many candidates skewed their responses toward 'description' of data capture rather than emphasising the 'explanation' aspect of the question associated with 'suitability' of the method. This was another example of the importance of the trigger command words being important. Reference to fieldwork was variable in depth, development and its integration into the structure of the answers, and was frequently implicit. Many candidates regarded sampling as a method of data collection.

In part (b) candidates could clearly give limitations and improvements here, though many emphasised the limitations rather than the improvements. However some struggled in clearly justifying their improvements by clearly referring to the fieldwork. It was very obvious which centres had 'taught' candidates answers and those where students had first hand experience of fieldwork and the subsequent improvements. It is vital for centres to have rigorous fieldwork and time to analyse all aspects of this (in other words write a detailed piece of fieldwork) so that higher marks can be accessed. Many candidates were only able to offer straightforward justifications for improvements such as 'it will increase reliability/accuracy' without offering further supporting statements. Command words prove to be a continuing discriminator.

## Question 3

This appeared to be another question where many students had 'learnt' their conclusion and then rewrote this in the exam. This usually enabled access to Level 2. However, more able students were able to adapt to the requirements of the question, clearly state their conclusions, evaluate the usefulness of these and develop the implications. The term 'implications' was not always fully understood. Where implications were covered reasonably well, they were largely presented as a 'questioning of the theory-in-use' or a 'questioning of the pragmatics of the study and the need for extension studies'. Few candidates branched out to assess the implications beyond Geography, for example transfers into the context of pragmatic uses by planners or farmers. A number of candidates experienced some difficulty in recognising what their conclusions actually were and thus were unable to evaluate them effectively.

## Question 4

In part (a) candidates either understood or did not; there did not appear to be much middle ground. Most candidates were able to cope well with this question and were able to discuss the result in terms of the criteria needed. A few candidates failed to locate the calculated value correctly within the context of the levels of significance.

Part (b) was quite well done, with most candidates suggesting scatter graphs with appropriate ideas relating to presentation and analysis. Some suggested line graphs, bar graphs and proportional symbols, all of which were credited if they presented the data in a valid format.

Part (c) offered the opportunity for candidates to demonstrate that they were able to 'think like a geographer', covering the synoptic element of assessment. Most candidates wrote balanced answers with both statistical and graphical techniques, although some just discussed statistical methods. Detail was variable, ranging from no mention of any appropriate techniques, an analysis of those given in the question, to a detailed and

comprehensive coverage of a variety of statistical and graphical techniques. There was often good description and explanation, although understanding was not always well expressed. Again the importance of the command word 'explain' as a trigger for discrimination cannot be understated.