

Version



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

Geography

GEO4A

(Specification 2030)

Unit 4A: Geography Fieldwork Investigation

Report on the Examination

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General

This was the fourth 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. 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, including all candidates undertaking the same investigation, varied investigations in small groups and completely individual investigations. Fieldwork on rivers continues to be popular, and, in addition, coasts, sand dunes, 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 and used in responses.

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 that they had undertaken fieldwork, developed their investigative skills and are confident in applying the fieldwork experience.
- 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.
- 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 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.

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 and comment on 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.
- On the other hand, some candidates suggested several different methods of, for example, data collection when only one was requested. This tended to dilute the focus of the response.
- 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.

Question 1

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 theory to the location. Most candidates were able to make more than a passing reference to this link, though many focused on accessibility, safety or location to the centre, rather than theory. 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. Candidates are reminded that such diagrams should be made relevant to the question by judicious use of annotation.

Question 2

The great majority of candidates were able to describe their method of data collection, but not all were able to justify measures to ensure accuracy and reliability. Accuracy and reliability were frequently covered, but many candidates were unable to move on to justify the measures taken. Most candidates were able to access Level 2. Again, the best candidates were able to refer with confidence to their experience in the field.

Question 3

This question encouraged many candidates to demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of presentational skills. Scatter graphs were the most popular choice, with kite diagrams, line graphs, bar graphs and proportional symbols all well represented. Explanation for the use was invariably present and cogent, but not all candidates were able to offer an evaluation of the effectiveness of the method of data presentation. The use of a diagram was often helpful, especially when annotated to assist use and/or evaluation of its effectiveness. 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 the ability to be synoptic and being able to ‘think like a geographer’.

Question 4

The responses to this question were encouraging. Candidates were able to refer to their results and then offer relevant extensions and development. There are many ways in which this could be demonstrated, including extension/development of results, methods/limitations, the overall success of the investigation, the location, amongst others. Many candidates restricted themselves to straightforward statements such as collection of more data, returning at different times of day, month and/or year. The better candidates were able to demonstrate good understanding of appropriate extensions and developments, related to their experience in the field.

Question 5 (a)

Candidates were very well prepared for this skill. The question allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of Chi² and then to use the information provided to comment on the distribution of population in Leicester. The majority of candidates reached Level 2 for this question, as they demonstrated familiarity with the skill. The best candidates were able to use a wide range of the information provided and show high level interpretative skills. Centres are reminded that this section can refer to any of the skills from the list in the specification.

Question 5 (b)

Most candidates showed sound knowledge of suitable statistical techniques, though a number did drift into mapping skills. There was usually a good range of techniques identified, although the evaluation of the usefulness of the techniques was not always well expressed. The best candidates made reference to the usefulness of the techniques to, for example, planners, politicians or governments. Again the importance of the command word assess as a trigger for discrimination cannot be understated.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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