

Version



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

Geography

GEO4A

(Specification 2030)

Unit 4A: Geography Fieldwork Investigation

Report on the Examination

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General

This was the fifth examination in this specification in which fieldwork and fieldwork skills were assessed by written examination. It was again pleasing to see the commendable 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, 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 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 good number of candidates continue to 'think like a geographer'.
- The application of knowledge in unfamiliar contexts was demonstrated by a competent interpretation of the cartographic 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 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.
- A very small number of 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 are not always able to respond in a focused manner to the questions set.
- Conversely, some candidates state very complex aims and find it a challenge to keep to a clear focus.
- Some candidates were unclear about the terms secondary data and cartographic as applied in this paper.
- The consistent application of detailed knowledge of the fieldwork undertaken to move from the implicit to the explicit and thus, consistently access the higher mark bands.

Question 1

This question was answered well with most candidates accessing Level 2 and a fair number Level 3. The majority of candidates were able to suggest a range of reasons for the choice of their fieldwork location, but many were less confident in explaining the importance of the choice in relation to the aims. Some focused on purely on reasons for the choice of location, a previous question. Most candidates were able to make more than a passing reference to this link to the aims and focused on accessibility, safety or location to the centre, theory and the characteristics of the area selected. 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. Such diagrams should be made relevant to the question by focused use of annotation.

Question 2(a)

The great majority of candidates were able to outline in a basic way their method of data collection, but not all were able to show the detail indicating rigour for access to Level 2. Again, the best candidates were able to refer with confidence to their experience in the field. Candidates were clearly aware of the nature of primary data and its collection. Explanation was not required.

Question 2 (b)

All candidates were able to show some awareness of the limitations and potential improvements of their data collection. However, more able candidates were focused on the need to evaluate the suitability of the method, rather than an evaluation of the method used. Thus there was, for example, assessment of how well the data collected was able to support the aims of the fieldwork investigation. Again, the best candidates were able to refer to their experience in the field.

Question 3

The great majority of candidates responded well to this question, though not all were fully aware of the nature of secondary data. Examiners accepted any data that the candidate had not collected themselves in the field. This question encouraged many candidates to demonstrate a good knowledge of the types and uses of secondary data, though not all were able to show how it was or could be used to develop conclusions. A good number of candidates 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’).

Question 4

Almost universally, candidates responded well to the stimulus of the three maps of population in Australia. Candidates were able to refer to each figure and comment on the respective strengths and weaknesses. Most made some reference to the detail on the maps, though some were more specific than others. The best candidates were able to fully respond to the command word and were able to critically assess, on a comparative basis, the three figures.

Question 5

Some candidates appeared less well-prepared for this question. Many appeared to be uncertain of the term ‘cartographic’ and referred to techniques and skills that were not map based. The most popular choices were flow, trip and desire lines. Candidates also frequently referred to located symbol maps. A number referred to graphs or other skills without reference to the required cartographic (spatial) context. Ordnance Survey maps and GIS resources used as base maps were also frequently mentioned techniques, with overlays commonly covered. There was competent explanation of the uses of the techniques suggested, with the best candidates making reference to the contribution to their personal geographical knowledge. The use of cartography in the candidate’s own fieldwork was frequently a successful approach.