

## **A LEVEL**

*Moderators' report*

# **GEOGRAPHY**

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**H481**

For first teaching in 2016

## **H481/04/05 Summer 2019 series**

Version 1

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## Introduction

Our Moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on centres' assessment of moderated work, based on what has been observed by our moderation team. These reports include a general commentary of accuracy of internal assessment judgements; identify good practice in relation to evidence collation and presentation and comments on the quality of centre assessment decisions against individual Learning Objectives. This report also highlights areas where requirements have been misinterpreted and provides guidance to centre assessors on requirements for accessing higher mark bands. Where appropriate, the report will also signpost to other sources of information that centre assessors will find helpful.

OCR completes moderation of centre-assessed work in order to quality assure the internal assessment judgements made by assessors within a centre. Where OCR cannot confirm the centre's marks, we may adjust them in order to align them to the national standard. Any adjustments to centre marks are detailed on the Moderation Adjustments report, which can be downloaded from Interchange when results are issued. Centres should also refer to their individual centre report provided after moderation has been completed. In combination, these centre-specific documents and this overall report should help to support centres' internal assessment and moderation practice for future series.

## General overview/Introduction

Congratulations to candidates and teachers for creating such a wide variety of innovative and interesting Independent Investigations in 2019. There can be no doubt that the vast majority of candidates were fully engaged by, and committed to, their investigations. Many written reports were a joy to read and moderate. The moderators saw a wide variety of different titles and it was clear that candidates had, on the most part, worked independently of each other to investigate processes, concepts and issues that were closely related to the specification. While many candidates chose to investigate aspects of the specification related to Changing Spaces: Making Places, the moderators also saw high-quality investigations that focused on coastal processes, carbon stores, glaciation, infiltration, and soils.

A small number of candidates submitted investigations that had only tenuous connections to the A Level geography specification and, unfortunately, some submitted investigations that should not have been given a green light by their teachers. These included a handful of investigations into Bradshaw's Model and some investigations of sand dune zonation/succession. Teachers are reminded that the Proposal Form should be used to indicate how the proposed investigation links to the specification – it is expected that candidates refer to specific topics and page numbers. If this link cannot be made then teachers should use the Proposal Form to advise candidates to think again about the validity of their investigation.

A substantial number of Investigations exceeded the recommended word length of 3000-4000 words. A significant number of Investigations were very long indeed. On the one hand, the Investigation is clearly a labour of love for some candidates who see the report as an opportunity to excel in an area of geography that they enjoy. Besides, many candidates of this age find it very hard to edit and precis their work. On the other hand, many lengthy reports would, in all likelihood, have received a similar mark if they had been **much** shorter. The fact is that the lengthiest reports are usually packed with unnecessary description – often in the introduction and analysis sections. I will offer advice later in this report about how unnecessary description could be removed.

Some of the strongest investigations came from candidates who had designed their own titles and enquiry pathway from scratch, often based in their local or home area. Equally, some residential fieldtrips/field centres offered excellent bases for candidates who produced strong Investigations, with individual titles arrived at with care. Successful candidates on residential fieldtrips had a clear individual focus and identified both the nature of and value of group data.

### Administration

The majority of centres administered the Non-exam assessment faultlessly with all of the essential paperwork completed correctly. Thank you to all teachers involved. Your hard work is much appreciated as correct administration makes the work of the moderator much more straightforward. Moderators check the following paperwork. If any items are missing or incorrectly completed, as was the case for some centres, moderators are obliged to contact the centre which results in unnecessary delays to the process of moderation. The following items are required at the front of each candidate's submission:

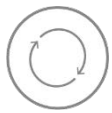
- A Level Independent Investigation Proposal Form, this must be signed by the teacher
- A Level Mark Recording Sheet
- One copy of the Candidate Record Form and Centre Declaration Form for **each** candidate in the sample. Each of these must be signed by the teacher **and** candidate. If the candidate has received any assistance beyond that given to the class as a whole and beyond that described in the specification, this additional support must be indicated and taken into account when marking the candidates work.

Moderators also expect to see a copy of the Mark Recording Sheet for each candidate in the sample. Page 1 of this document, which summarises the mark, is essential. However, moderators also expect to

see, and find extremely helpful, the subsequent pages of this document which provide details of the marking criteria. See my comments below about levels of annotation. Please make sure that all marks on pages 2 to 7 of the Mark Recording Sheet tally with those recorded on the front cover of this document; that these marks are totalled correctly; and that the total matches the mark inputted to the OCR Interchange. Moderation is delayed when clerical errors are discovered.

The Independent Investigation Proposal Form for each candidate provides evidence of the planning process, and therefore, gives the moderator an insight into the level of independence achieved by each candidate. While the vast majority of centres provide copies of the Proposal Form, I was surprised to see that very few centres provide any written guidance to the candidates. It would be helpful to see the level of general guidance given by teachers documented on the Proposal Form. The type of comments that are permitted are clearly described on pages 55, 74 and 75 of the specification.

The process of moderation depends entirely on effective annotation by the original assessor. The moderator hopes to see comments that (a) relate directly to specific qualitative phrases used in the marking criteria, and (b) direct reference to places in the candidates' written report where evidence of work meeting the standard of the criteria can be found. Where the assessor provides this level of annotation, and understands the marking criteria, moderation is a simple job of confirming the decisions made by the original assessor. A large number of centres provide effective levels of annotation. However, in a significant number of cases, the level of annotation did not provide sufficient evidence for the moderator to do his/her job.

	<p><b>AfL</b></p>	<p>In order to provide sufficient and effective annotation please:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage all candidates to paginate their reports, then, refer to specific pages in the candidates' reports where evidence of achievement at certain levels can be seen.</li> <li>• Provide concise qualitative statements on pages 2-7 of the Mark Recording Sheet that relate to the bullet points in the marking criteria.</li> <li>• Where possible, provide a very brief indication on the candidates' written reports to show where significant achievements have been made. If used (and these annotations are very helpful) these comments must be summative. Never use formative comments on a candidate's NEA.</li> </ul>
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**Interpretation of the marking criteria**

Marking was, in most cases, closely in-line with the published marking criteria and accurate – at least within the correct level – across all six sections. A few points are worth noting:

- There were some outstanding investigations, deserving of full marks. Centres should use the full range of marks where appropriate. Full marks need not necessarily mean perfection.
- Where marking was generous, it tended to be in respect of data presentation (Section 3 in the marking criteria) or analysis and interpretation (Section 4).
- Where marking was severe, it sometimes occurred in the Introduction, where candidates had often read widely and thoroughly about both the issue and the place context. However, severe marking was also noted in Sections 3 and 4 – the same sections that were sometimes marked generously by other centres.
- It can be very difficult to support the centre's marking if the level of annotation on the Mark Recording Sheet is insufficient. In these cases, the moderator effectively has to re-mark the work


and the likelihood of disagreeing with the original mark seems to increase. Hopefully this provides an incentive for more detailed and clear annotations.

## Commentary on the individual sections of the report

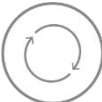
### 1. Planning purpose and introduction

Most candidates included all of the required elements of Section 1 – aims and research questions, a locational context, a literature review and, a justification - but the importance and relevance of these elements was not always understood by the candidates. So, some candidates spent a lot of time and effort focussing on one of these elements, sometimes to the detriment of the others. For example, some candidates wrote fabulous literature reviews that demonstrated many hours had been spent in background research as the plan was emerging. However, in some cases, these literature reviews were far too long – in extreme cases the introductions were in excess of 2000 words and included references to numerous academic reports. In other Investigations, the candidates did not really have a literature review at all. They sometimes relied on their own understanding to explain the theoretical background. In other cases, candidates spent too long providing an unnecessary historical geography of their study area – presumably gleaned from Wikipedia. So, some candidates are producing very lengthy introductions. An effective introduction will be quite short – perhaps only 500 words.

The theory described in Section 1 should underpin the whole Investigation. In some cases, the introduction was seen as a ‘bolt-on’ to the whole report – theoretical understanding was described in isolation and not successfully related to the candidate’s own research. Geographical theory often remained within the introduction and was not used effectively across the different sections of the report – the theoretical understanding (and literature) should be discussed again in the analysis and conclusions of an effective report.

	<p><b>Misconception</b></p>	<p>A significant number of centres/candidates seem to have misconceptions about the introduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no need for candidates to provide a glossary of key terms and their definitions. This is not only unnecessary; it adds to the word count.</li> <li>• Candidates often used maps effectively. However, maps were at times inserted into Section 1 without any discussion or purpose. Maps of the UK with a location pin pointed at the field study site are not required – but large scale maps are highly effective. Maps should have an indication of scale, bearing and full title. Centres are reminded that candidates should discuss place context, and that locality maps should be used in ways relevant to the purposes of the investigation.</li> <li>• Some candidates would benefit from a clearer understanding of the use of a hypothesis as opposed to research questions.</li> </ul>
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The essence of a good enquiry often lies in the title. Teachers should think carefully about how titles are arrived at by candidates.

	<b>AfL</b>	<p>The following pointers are offered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Scale of study.</b> Successful enquiries tended to be based on areas at an appropriate local scale. Peterborough as a city is too large, as is a London borough. Some candidates sought individuality through comparison with another location in order to enhance their individuality compared to other candidates in their cohort. Where scale was already too large, comparisons with another place simply compounded the problem and made candidate investigations even less likely to produce successful outcomes. Most successful investigations focused on localities – for example, Super-Output Areas.</li> <li>• A <b>clearly identified pathway to enquiry</b> is required, where the sequence of sub-questions or hypotheses were logical and flowed from one into another. There is no defined pathway to success – candidates are free to use either research questions or hypotheses to provide a framework for their investigation.</li> <li>• Less successful investigations often had flaws which could be identified in the <b>title</b> – for example, where candidates tried to assess 'effects' or 'impacts'. It is extremely difficult to assess impacts, when few students can effectively research the 'back-story' behind new developments or redeveloped sites. Where 'successful' formed part of the title, few candidates really dissected what the word 'successful' might mean or how judgements might be arrived at.</li> <li>• Clear, detailed and relevant <b>background reading</b> which gave a clear context to an investigation, and from which a title could be given a clear rationale. Breadth of reading and contextual study came from sources appropriate to A level, such as 'Geography review', 'Geofile', 'GeoActive' and the GA 'Top Spec' series of books.</li> </ul>
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## 2. Data, information collection methods and sampling framework

Suitable methodologies were generally selected and described and many candidates had clearly given some consideration to all of the main elements – sample type, sample size, risk assessment and ethical considerations. Surprisingly, perhaps, a significant number of candidates struggled, or forgot, to justify their methods. What was not so surprising is that some confusion still exists around sampling frameworks and the need to carefully consider the location, **frequency** and **timing** of the sample. For example, sampling that was actually opportunistic/pragmatic was often described as random and stratified sampling is poorly understood.

Many data samples were small – too small to be either representative or provide useful and conclusive evidence. This may be because some centres/candidates had not set aside enough **time** to generate sufficient data. Candidates frequently confessed that they only had an hour or two to collect data. No wonder, then, that they did not collect data at different times to investigate temporal change or from multiple locations to investigate spatial patterns. Centres are reminded that candidates can share data collected in groups, and that this is often an effective way of generating larger and more useful sample sizes.

Many candidates presented information about methodologies in the form of a table - perhaps in the misguided belief that this would not be included in the word count – using simplistic headings such as method, justification, location and limitations that were reminiscent of GCSE controlled assessment. This




limited the discussion candidates made about sampling frameworks. Methodology tables are certainly a useful way for some candidates to organise their thoughts, however, they tend to be descriptive, superficial or repetitious because candidates feel the need to fill every box. What is actually needed is an explanation/justification of the sampling framework rather than a lengthy description. Perhaps methodology tables would be better used as a drafting device – allowing the candidates to extract the most important details for a discussion, in extended prose, in the report itself.

Many candidates did not include any evidence of primary data collection sheets (making use of the appendix) in order to demonstrate their rationale for questionnaires or other methodologies.

The vast majority of centres advised their candidates to adopt a suitable structure for each fieldwork report. However, a small number of centres gave inappropriate advice. For example, some centres submitted reports that had no methodology and/or no presentation of results – these essential elements were confined to an appendix. Teachers are reminded that the finished written report must include the elements required by the six sections of the marking criteria. The appendix should only be used to provide additional information rather than evidence that is required for the marking criteria to be applied.

<b><i>Methodologies were successful where candidates:</i></b>	<b><i>Methodologies were less successful where candidates:</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrated an understanding and familiarity used methodologies that were appropriate to collect data that was valid for the aims of their investigation.</li> <li>• a number of candidates are using various apps to locate their data and also carry out questionnaires and surveys. Candidates are linking this well into the idea of ethical considerations.</li> <li>• organised the investigation by hypothesis/research question and then structured the methodology around the hypothesis/research question. This seemed to help candidates ensure the data collection was considered and closely linked to the investigation.</li> <li>• gave careful consideration to the timing and frequency of sampling.</li> <li>• used a substantial volume of primary data.</li> <li>• used relevant secondary data sources.</li> <li>• used photos to illustrate data collection.</li> <li>• located sample sites on a map.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• did not consider whether data, collected as part of a group on a residential fieldtrip, was valid to the specific aims of their own investigation.</li> <li>• relied too heavily on a limited amount of data from only one or two sources, consisting often of small questionnaire samples or other simplistic techniques from former GCSE Controlled Assessment fieldwork, such as Environmental Quality which had not been adapted to suit the purpose of the A level Investigation.</li> <li>• did not limit the number of variables or overlooked variables that would affect their analysis. For example, candidates should beware drawing on house price data – for example, in judging whether house prices were a determinant of success in a regeneration or new development. House prices are affected by all kinds of macro- and micro-factors, and it is hard, without considerable professionally-derived data, to arrive at any conclusions. London’s housing market, for example, is affected by global investment as much as local changes.</li> </ul>

	<b>OCR support</b>	<p>To support candidates understanding of the investigative process to include sampling, please access the resource for further information:</p> <p><a href="https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/386110-a-level-geography-geographical-investigations-field-studies-council-2016-.pdf">https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/386110-a-level-geography-geographical-investigations-field-studies-council-2016-.pdf</a></p>
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### 3. Data presentation techniques

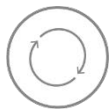
Data presentation remains a strength for many candidates. The moderators saw some fabulous examples of maps and graphs that were both drawn by hand and using various apps and programmes. An increasing number of candidates, compared to last year, presented data spatially. Some candidates demonstrated flair and innovation in combining photos with maps or graphs with maps so that data could be geo-located. Some did this by hand, sometimes using tracing paper, while an increasing number of candidates used GIS packages such as Digimaps or ArcGIS to create maps with overlays. While the maps produced by these packages can be impressive, some of the most impressive data presentation had been drawn by hand. These included some amazing and very sophisticated maps where photos and graphs had been located on a printed base map. As well as some fabulous field sketches – so old and new technologies both have their place in contemporary fieldwork.

As mentioned above, an increasing number of candidates are using GIS packages to create maps. These can be very impressive. However, in much the same way that candidates used to misuse Excel to produce unsuitable graphs, a significant number of candidates are now using GIS apps to produce unsuitable and/or incomplete maps. For example, the commonest form of GIS map seems to be one with located proportional symbols – these are usually circles or bars. However, very few candidates give these symbols a legend or a scale – so it is impossible to read the data that is being presented on the map. Furthermore, proportional circles are most suitable when the range of data is very large – because their area (rather than height) is in proportion to the data. Many candidates use proportional circles indiscriminately – they have become the Excel doughnut pie chart of GIS – even when the range of their data is very small. This means that all the circles look a similar size so the map is difficult to read. In these circumstances it is difficult to assess the map as being either sophisticated or suitable. This helps to explain why some centres were generous in their marking of this Section.

### 4. Data analysis and explanation

The analysis of data, and its interpretation, is a demanding skill and this is certainly the section of the report that created the greatest differentiation. It is also an area of the report that is perhaps misunderstood by some assessors and, as a consequence, was sometimes marked too generously.

The marking criteria refer to the selection and use of **methods** of analysis. These methods can be quite simple. For example, simple colour coding can be used to code an interview. Annotation can be used to identify and interpret key features in a photo. Quantitative data can be ranked, sorted and filtered. Candidates can calculate simple measures of central tendency or range. Other methods can be more complex and specialised, of course, and these include various statistical tests. Some candidates used one or more of these methods, including statistical tests, successfully. Many candidates used one or more of these simple methods rather tentatively. However, some candidates/centres did not use any of these methods at all. Instead, they relied on lengthy descriptions of their data.

	<p><b>AfL</b></p>	<p>Time needs to be spent in the first part of the A level course teaching methods of analysis in some centres so that candidates can, with some confidence, select and apply the most appropriate methods when it comes to conducting an independent investigation.</p>
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Having said all of that, it is evident that some centres are teaching the use of statistical tests effectively. However, some candidates are using statistical tests in isolation and without justification or discussion of the significance of the result. Effective use of Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient was quite frequently seen. Mann Whitney and Chi Square are also appropriate in many circumstances and were occasionally seen.

Generally speaking, the majority of candidates produced an analysis that was too long and **too descriptive**. This is certainly an area where candidates could dramatically cull the length of their report. The focus should be on punchy interpretation of selected data and reference back to theoretical understanding (gleaned from the literature review).

<p><i>Analysis was successful when candidates:</i></p>	<p><i>Analysis was less successful where candidates:</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>used a few recognised <b>methods</b> of analysis</li> <li><b>annotated</b> their photos. Careful annotations and use of comparative images (old and new) for some higher level candidates were embedded throughout the study.</li> <li>structured the analysis around the hypotheses/research questions rather than individual graphs/maps.</li> <li>analysed <b>selected</b> data.</li> <li>made effective use of null hypothesis before applying a statistical test.</li> <li>the extended prose was short and interpretative rather than descriptive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>missed opportunities for coding – instead producing tables of transcript answers from interviews conducted.</li> <li>missed opportunities for annotation of photos. In some cases labels were added but these did not interpret the evidence in the image.</li> <li>did not test the significance of the results of their statistical test (even where it was both appropriate and accurate) and did not interpret it in relation to their study – it was simply presented as a technique to be ticked off.</li> <li>did not provide connections to geographical theories.</li> </ul>

### 5. Conclusions and investigation evaluation

The most able candidates used this section to evaluate the whole investigation to demonstrate they understood the validity of their conclusions based on the small amount of data collected. The most successful conclusions were kept quite short – they did not repeat the analysis but drew evidence together, with references to their reading, allowing them to progress into a natural conclusion of their overall question or title.

In many cases conclusions were weaker than evaluations. Many candidates made generalised conclusions which would have benefitted from greater use of their data to make substantiated comments. Where data was used to substantiate conclusions, this was usually the primary data – secondary data was sometimes ignored.

A number of candidates reached a conclusion that had no bearing on their original title – but also had made no reference as to why they might have had to change it.

In many cases the conclusions were too long and repetitive – this is another area where candidates could be challenged to stick more closely to guidance on word counts. Too many candidates presented this in the form of a conclusion to each of their research questions or hypotheses without reaching a final overall conclusion.


It was clear that in a number of cases where the focus had been perception of a place – there was no reference to this or candidates had not fully understood the meaning of terms such as perception, diversity, inequality; nor did they reach a conclusion that showed them making a judgement of these ideas, especially where a “to what extent” question had been used.

In some candidates' reports, the evaluations focused mainly on issues with data collection. There is an expectation within the marking criteria of an evaluation of the ‘whole’ investigation.

**6. Overall quality and communication of written work.**

Candidates should be commended for the quality of their written communication. The use of extended prose and technical language was high level and mature. The majority of candidates structured their reports with sensible sub-headings. Many were careful to give each figure a suitable caption.

As mentioned earlier, the literature review should not be seen as a 'bolt-on' task that is divorced from the fieldwork or report writing. The most successful candidates made links to their theoretical understanding throughout the reports and also referred to literature sources throughout.

	<p><b>AfL</b></p>	<p>Simple improvements could be made in future candidates' submissions to include: All candidates should be encouraged to paginate their reports as this helps with the process of moderation. Candidates could also be reminded of the need to reference their sources throughout the report.</p>
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## Avoiding potential malpractice

Centres are reminded to take great care to avoid potential maladministration of the NEA. The following points should be noted:

- at the proposal stage, the candidates must make a clear link between their proposed investigation and the specification. Teachers can provide broad parameters about suitable themes from the specification and, therefore, should advise when themes are unsuitable. See page 55 of the specification;
- teachers must review each Proposal Form to make sure that the proposed investigation can suitably access the marking criteria. Where candidates are proposing similar investigations or methodologies that include working collaboratively, the teacher must give general guidance on the importance of personalised methodologies and independent working when presenting and analysing data that has been collected as part of a group;
- before submission for external moderation, teachers must make sure that the required forms are included with the sample. There are three required forms; including the Candidate Proposal Form, Mark Recoding Sheet and the Candidate Record Form and Centre Declaration Sheet (this form **MUST** be signed by both the teacher and candidate).

## Helpful resources

To support candidates with their Independent Investigation please don't forget there are a number of useful resources on the OCR Geography A Level page online. The resources are all listed within the Non-Exam assessment (NEA) tab:

<https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-and-a-level/geography-h081-h481-from-2016/assessment/>

Particularly helpful resources **for candidates** include:

- Independent Investigation – guide to developing titles and completing the proposal form
- Independent Investigation – student guide
- Geographical Investigations – Field Studies Council

**For teachers**, please refer to the:

- Independent Investigation outcomes (2018)

<https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/521840-independent-investigation-outcomes-autumn-2018.pdf>

- Candidate exemplars with annotated comments from the Principal Moderator (2018). These will also be available for the 2019 cohort in the Autumn term.

There are CPD opportunities available to support you:

- Understanding assessment of the Independent Investigation (face to face)
- Ask the Principal Moderator – understanding assessment of the Independent Investigation (webinar)

- Independent Investigation clinic – Free - Q&A webinar with the Geography Subject Advisor

Materials can be downloaded for free from the CPD hub for all the Independent Investigation training, this includes:

<https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/professional-development/upcoming-courses/?subject=Geography#past-courses>

- Independent Investigation feedback (2018) and effective marking. There are further candidate exemplars included in these training materials.
- Developing a deeper understanding of the A level Independent Investigation (March 2019)
- Tackling the Independent Investigation (2017 / 2018). This is particularly helpful for teachers new to this component within the A Level assessment.
- Marking the Independent Investigation (2017 / 2018)

If you have any questions about the NEA or you would like to discuss your student's proposal forms then please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Geography Subject Advisor – [geography@ocr.org.uk](mailto:geography@ocr.org.uk)

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