



# **General Certificate of Secondary Education**

## **Geography 40303**

### *Specification A*

**40303 Full and Short Course  
Centre Assessed Controlled Assessment**

## **Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination - June series*

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## General

**This is the first year of Controlled Assessments and, as the GCSE course is now modular, centres were able to enter work from candidates in year 10. Some centres have moved to a three-year GCSE course so work from year 9 candidates was also moderated.**

The options available for centres are limited to eleven tasks set by AQA, one of which must be selected for the investigation. Fieldwork must be evident within the work so centres need to contextualise the task to meet local circumstances and opportunities. Coursework Advisers are allocated to centres to offer advice in relation to the appropriateness of tasks and the data collection methods involved. They also help centres understand and interpret the marking criteria and the Levels of Control involved.

The legacy coursework component allowed candidates to complete work at home and the only time restrictions were those set by individual centres. With the Controlled Assessments, candidates have to complete all of the work, apart from data collection, in no more than 20 hours under the direct supervision of teachers or other members of staff at centres.

The quality of the work moderated was comparable with coursework seen in previous years from the legacy specifications. The Controlled Assessment investigations often had a very clear focus because they were shorter in length. The geographical concepts and processes studied were evident and applied accurately within the investigations. The full range of marks was seen and most centres were able to allow clear differentiation to take place. Standards of organisation and presentation were variable, but the best work moderated was outstanding.

As with the legacy coursework, the majority of the work seen was teacher directed, but in Controlled Assessments the teachers are not allowed to guide students during the High Level Control phases of the task.

Many centres were able to apply the marking criteria consistently so the samples of their studies were within tolerance. The marking criteria were clearly understood by the teachers in these centres and the progression evident within the criteria had informed the planning of the work carried out. There were, however, a number of centres out of tolerance because one or more studies had not been accurately moderated within the centres concerned. In two cases centres had marked the work of their candidates using the legacy GCSE coursework criteria and so had awarded marks out of 30 instead of 60. Both centres were required to re-mark the work of all candidates.

## ***Administration***

This year the moderation of centre-assessed work was delayed. A volcanic eruption in Iceland at Easter meant that many teachers were stranded overseas and were delayed in their return to school. As a result some centres were not able to standardise the work of their candidates and send in marks to moderators by the deadline. Extensions were granted to some centres but late arrival of marks, important documents and the sample of studies, caused moderators to spend too much time sending letters and contacting centres. In one instance work for moderation arrived five weeks late even though the centre had been contacted by letter and telephone. Where there are no more than 20 candidates, centres should send all work to the moderator and not wait for a sample to be requested.

There were many instances of centres failing to include Centre Declaration Sheets with the work, or with the marks, and these had to be requested by the moderators. One centre failed to attach Candidate Mark Forms to the work and these too had to be requested. The moderators require both forms and Examinations Officers could assist the moderation process by ensuring that these forms are sent with the work sampled.

There were many instances of inaccurate recording of marks on the Centre Mark Sheets. Some candidates had two different marks recorded because errors had been over-written and both marks encoded. This affected the sampling process so centres must make alterations clear when encoding the Centre Mark Sheets. Moderators often saw errors in the addition of marks awarded to candidates and this can also affect the sampling process.

Some centres carried out the administrative requirements with commendable accuracy and efficiency and this certainly assisted the moderation process.

Centres should not use any form of postal or delivery service where a signature is required for the receipt of documents or work. Without a signature, the work may be returned to a sorting office or dispatch office at some distance from the moderator's home address. This can lead to delays in the moderation process.

## ***Task Choices***

The most popular tasks were those based on Water on the Land, The Coastal Zone, Changing Urban Environments and Tourism. Centres successfully contextualised the chosen task so that their candidates were able to produce valid investigations. Only one centre deviated from the task to the extent that there was a cause for concern. This was made clear to the centre in the feedback from the moderator. There was one example of a centre selecting a task from the incorrect year of submission.

## ***The Investigations***

Many investigations exceeded the guidance of 2000 words. This was particularly evident where very able candidates had access to ICT for the majority, or all, of the time allowed for the task. However, it was not felt that any centres had breached the 20 hours time limit. Investigations should be kept as close to 2000 words as possible.

Moderators saw investigations that were highly organised and effectively presented. ICT access may have been a problem for some centres and some investigations contained combinations of hand written work and ICT produced material in varying combinations. This is acceptable.

Teacher annotations on the work indicating Levels and marks were very helpful to moderators.

## ***The Marking Criteria***

The assessment objectives were developed from those used for the legacy GCSE coursework. Changes were made in order to make the requirements for each part of the criteria as explicit as possible. Each of the assessment objectives contains three Levels with each Level statement containing a number of different criteria. **Candidates must fulfil the requirements for a particular Level before they can be awarded marks in a higher Level. It is not possible to award Level 3 marks before the candidate has met the requirements for Levels 1 and 2.** Candidates may produce evidence that contributes towards the requirements of the higher Level criteria, but it is only when the lower Level requirements have been fulfilled that the higher

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Level evidence is considered and credited. The application of the marking criteria, therefore, is not a 'best-fit' model; it requires evidence of progression through the Level statements of the assessment objectives.

There is a difference in the quality of evidence required to access a Level and that required to be secure at the top of the same Level. A problem seen by moderators is where centres credit a candidate at the top of a Level when the evidence suggests that the candidate has only just accessed that particular Level. When this approach is used across several sections of the marking criteria, it leads to the centre marks being outside of the tolerance set by the Board.

## ***Geographical Understanding***

In the majority of cases, the investigations were well organised and underpinned by established geographical concepts that related to the taught Specification. Location evidence, whether in map form or through description, was usually very good. The location evidence should be used to 'fine tune' the marking within a Level; it cannot be used to move a candidate into or out of a Level.

To be successful in Geographical Understanding, the application of the geographical concepts underpinning the work must be thorough and used accurately throughout the investigation. The marking criteria in relation to this assessment objective are very clear as to how this can be achieved.

Level 1 requires candidates to identify and define the geographical concepts and/or processes that will underpin their investigation. Many candidates demonstrated this in the introduction to their investigation by making statements such as '**My key terms are:....**' and then stating and defining 4 or 5 such terms. Moderators do not need to see extensive glossaries or excessive coverage of established theory from textbooks. The key concepts/processes must be directly relevant to the investigation.

Once a candidate applies these concepts/processes appropriately within the methodology, they can access Level 2. The concepts/processes must then be applied appropriately throughout the interpretations, the conclusions and the evaluation. To gain all 12 marks in this section, the candidates should have used their key concepts/processes accurately throughout the entire body of the work, and located their study in detail.

The most obvious error made by centres in relation to Geographical Understanding was the failure of candidates to complete the Level 1 requirement. Whilst the investigations seen were certainly geographical in terms of content and the vocabulary used, the candidates could not earn marks above Level 1 if they failed to identify and define their key concepts/processes. Credit for general use of specialist terms is given in the Interpretation section of the assessment objectives. There were instances of key concept/processes being implicit within the investigations, and moderators gave some allowance for this, but candidates would be advised to make the key concepts/processes explicit. One way of achieving this is for candidates to highlight each key concept/process every time they use it within the work. Then they, their teachers and the moderators can clearly judge how effective they have been in applying these concepts/processes to their investigations.

## ***Methodology***

This section was tackled well by candidates with the majority gaining marks at Level 2 or above. The Specification requires candidates to use one clear hypothesis or question to focus the investigation. This allows candidates access to the full range of marks whilst producing

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investigations that are well organised and close to the guidance of 2000 words. There were some instances of investigations being based upon multiple-hypotheses, but these tended to become very weak in the Interpretation criteria as candidates had too much material to process, analyse and explain.

Once candidates had identified a question or issue, stated how the investigation was carried out and provided a clear description of valid data collection methods, at least one of which involved the collection of primary data, marks at Level 2 were awarded. Level 3 marks proved to be more difficult for candidates to access and for centres to mark.

'Originality' is not part of the marking criteria for Methodology. Instead, the descriptor makes it clear that candidates must plan at least one method of data collection themselves and this must make **a significant contribution to the** investigation. There are not an infinite number of data collection techniques available for candidates to use. Moderators do not expect to see totally original data collection techniques within all the investigations making up a sample. Instead they expect to see a range of methods being planned by candidates from a centre and where similar or the same data collection methods are used by candidates, different locations, times and sample sizes should be apparent. Secondary data can meet the Level 3 requirement here. The justification of all data collection methods used is another important feature of the Level 3 criteria. Where investigations are teacher directed, teachers must plan for Level 3 opportunities and not limit their candidates to the top of Level 2. Where candidates demonstrate clear evidence of the Level 3 requirements, this should be noted on the Candidate Record Form and by means of annotations in the body of the work. Moderators did see examples of data collection techniques that were 'bolt on' extensions to the investigation and these did not always develop the original investigation or help the candidate answer the question set or reach a more informed conclusion in relation to their hypothesis.

Marks can only be awarded for data collection methods that are actually used by the candidates within their investigations. Describing and justifying methods in the Methodology section does not earn credit unless there is evidence to show that data was collected by these methods, and the data was in the interpretation section of the investigation. Examples were seen where centres awarded marks to candidates for describing a particular data collection technique yet no results were present within the investigation.

The use of Methodology tables was popular this year. Some of these were excellent and candidates were able to describe and justify their data collection methods clearly and succinctly. Where such tables include columns for evaluative comments, candidates must complete these sections under High Levels of Control. Candidates who leave the evaluation of their methods until the Evaluation section of their investigation avoid duplication of key points and they link their methods and results more effectively.

Failure to include any primary data within the investigation limited candidates to marks in Level 1 in this part of the assessment criteria.

## ***Data Presentation***

The majority of candidates were able to access Level 2. As with the other criteria, the Level 3 requirements are more challenging and many centres over marked the work of their candidates in this section.

To reach Level 3 candidates must first fulfil the requirements for Levels 1 and 2. This requires a range of presentation techniques, which must be appropriate and accurate. Some candidates only employed one or two favourite techniques. It was not uncommon to see incomplete and

inaccurate work given undue credit. Graphs should always be complete with a title and labels on the axes. Maps should have a title, scale and a North arrow.

Once the requirements for Levels 1 and 2 have been met, candidates can access Level 3 by producing 'more complex' presentation techniques. These high order techniques, if completed accurately, may include; choropleth maps, scatter graphs, proportional flow lines, located pie charts, well annotated (not simply labelled) photographs, cross-sections drawn with due consideration to the scales used, dispersion graphs and so on. All such presentation techniques must have title, labels, key, scale, etc. Simple graphs produced using ICT are not Level 3 presentation techniques.

The use of ICT within the enquiry has a direct bearing on the marks awarded in this section. There must be clear ICT contributions to the investigation, excluding text, if the candidate is to be awarded any marks. If there is no evidence of ICT the candidate will gain no marks in this part of the marking criteria.

The quality of written communication was pleasing with the majority of candidates expressing themselves with reasonable accuracy and using specialised terms appropriately.

### ***Data Interpretation***

This section was a very powerful discriminator, with progression through the Levels being determined by the key 'triggers' of description/explanation, analysis and detailed analysis with links.

The main weakness seen was where candidates gave descriptions without reference to the data they had collected. Centres often over marked these descriptive accounts of the results.

Part of the Level 2 descriptor requires candidates '***to analyse their results by means of basic numerical data manipulation***'. In the best investigations the candidates described and analysed their results effectively. They organised and processed their data in such a manner that they could refer to percentages, fractions and ratios whilst identifying patterns and anomalies. This gave greater precision and meaning to their interpretations. They went on to provide logical explanations and demonstrate links between data sets. They reached valid conclusions (based on evidence) that related to the original hypothesis.

Centres often credited candidates with Level 3 marks when the analysis was poor or missing altogether and where no links between data sets were evident.

### ***Evaluation***

For Level 1 in this assessment objective candidates need to reflect just on their methods. For Level 2 they must go further by considering how specific problems relating to the methods could have impacted upon the quality of the results obtained. For Level 3 candidates must finally assess the impact of these processes on the validity of their conclusions.

In the best investigations, evaluation statements were quite detailed and specific to the enquiry rather than being vague and generic. Furthermore, instead of discussing the three components of the criteria separately, they proceeded to link the components. They achieved this by identifying the fact that specific problems with their methods would compromise the accuracy of a particular set of their results and that the conclusions, which were based on these results, would therefore have questionable validity.

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In the weaker enquiries, the evaluation was either missing or covered very briefly. Here the candidates often stated what went well or, if they reflected on possible improvements, they produced a 'wish list' of what they would like to do next time. Such statements were very basic and made no reference to results or conclusions.

The key point to remember about this section is that it is an opportunity for the candidate to provide an appraisal of the effectiveness of the investigation and to suggest how improvements can be made.

### ***Recommendations***

Many centres are enabling candidates of all abilities to produce interesting, relevant and, at times, exceptional investigations of small-scale issues. These centres are assessing their candidates accurately using the criteria set out by the Board.

Where centres are experiencing difficulties, there is support available from experienced Coursework Advisors and this can be arranged by contacting the Subject Office at AQA.

Centres must become familiar with the marking criteria; the statements within each Level should be used to plan the investigations. Support material provided by AQA gives guidance in terms of structuring the investigations and clarifies issues relating to the marking criteria and the Levels of Control involved with the Controlled Assessment.