



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Geography A

40303

(Specification 4030)

Unit 3: Local Fieldwork Investigation

Report on the Examination

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Full and Short Course

Centre Assessed Controlled Assessment 40303

General

This was the third year for submitting Controlled Assessments and, as the GCSE course is currently modular, schools and colleges were able to enter work from students other than those in year 11, however the majority of 70,000 students whose work was moderated were year 11 students.

The options available for schools and colleges 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 schools and colleges need to contextualise the task to meet local circumstances and opportunities. Controlled Assessment Advisors are allocated to schools and colleges to offer advice in relation to the appropriateness of tasks and the data collection methods involved. They also help schools and colleges understand and interpret the assessment criteria and the Levels of Control involved.

Students have to complete all of the Controlled Assessment work, apart from data collection, in no more than 20 hours under the direct supervision of teachers or other members of staff at schools and colleges.

The Controlled Assessment studies moderated this year often had a very clear focus because students investigated a single hypothesis or key question, as required by the Specification. In the best investigations, the geographical concepts and processes studied were clearly evident and applied accurately throughout the work. The full range of marks was seen and most schools and colleges were able to allow clear differentiation to take place. Standards of organisation and presentation were variable, but the best work moderated was outstanding.

The majority of the work seen was teacher directed, however teachers are not allowed to guide students during the High Level Control phase of the task.

Most schools and colleges were able to apply the assessment criteria consistently so their sample of investigations was within tolerance. The assessment criteria were clearly understood by the teachers in these schools and colleges and the progression evident within the criteria had informed their planning. There were, however, schools and colleges out of tolerance because one or more studies had not been accurately moderated within the schools and colleges concerned.

One issue that arose in a small number of schools and colleges was that of too much support or structure being provided for students. Writing frames are not allowed for this component. Schools and colleges can identify a range of possible presentation and organisational strategies for students but pre-prepared sheets cannot be provided for students to use.

Administration

Where there are no more than 20 students entered, schools and colleges should send all of the work to the moderator and not wait for a sample to be requested.

There were many instances of schools and colleges failing to include Centre Declaration Sheets with the work, or with the marks, and these had to be requested by the moderator. Examinations Officers could assist the moderation process by ensuring that all appropriate forms are sent with the work sampled.

There were far too many instances of inaccurate recording of marks on the Centre Mark Sheets. Some students had two different marks recorded because errors had been over-written and both marks encoded; schools and colleges must make alterations clear when encoding the Centre Mark Sheets. Moderators also saw errors in the addition of marks awarded to students and this sometimes had an impact on the sampling process so additional work had to be requested.

Most schools and colleges carried out the administrative requirements with commendable accuracy and efficiency and this certainly assisted the moderation process.

Schools and colleges 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 and this can lead to delays.

Students' work should not be sent in bulky folders and it would be helpful if work could be removed from plastic wallets. Student names and numbers must be recorded on the front of the Candidate Record Forms. Each student's work should be securely held together to avoid individual pages coming adrift from the rest of the work.

Task Choices

The most frequently attempted tasks were those based on Tourism, Changing Urban Environments, Water on the Land and the Coastal Zone. These tasks accounted for more than 90% of the work moderated this year. Schools and colleges successfully contextualised the chosen task so that their students were able to produce valid investigations. There were some instances of schools and colleges deviating from the task although not to a degree that invalidated the work produced.

The Investigations

Many investigations exceeded the guidance of 2000 words and some were far too long. This was particularly evident where very able students had access to ICT for the majority, or all, of the time allowed for the task. However, there was no evidence that any schools and colleges had breached the 20 hours time limit. Investigations should be kept as close to 2000 words as possible and Controlled Assessment advisors can help schools and colleges plan their work so that students reduce the amount of material produced yet still access the full mark range.

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

Teacher annotations on the work indicating levels and marks were very helpful to moderators and all schools and colleges should be encouraged to annotate the sample sent for moderation. This helps the moderators to see where the teachers have credited evidence of the assessment criteria being met.

The Assessment Criteria

Each strand of the assessment criteria has three levels with each level containing a number of different requirements. **Students must fulfil all of 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 student has met the requirements for Levels 1 and 2.** Students 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 level evidence is considered and credited. The application of the assessment criteria, therefore, should not be seen as a 'best-fit' model; it requires evidence of progression through the level statements present within each strand.

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 was where schools and colleges credited a student at the top of a level when the evidence was that the student has only just accessed that particular level. When this approach is used across more than one strand of the assessment criteria, it can quickly result in the schools and colleges marks being outside of the tolerance set by AQA.

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 awarding of marks within a level; it cannot be used to move a student into or out of a level.

To be successful in Geographical Understanding, the geographical concepts or processes underpinning the work must be identified and defined and then used accurately throughout the investigation. The assessment criteria in relation to this strand are very clear as to how this can be achieved.

Level 1 requires students to identify and define the geographical concepts and/or processes (key terms) that will underpin their investigation. Many students 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. There were many instances of students listing and defining terms that were claimed to be ‘key terms’; metre stick, ruler, OS Map, sluice gate, methods table, flow line map, Park Warden and OAP were all seen this year and credited as being appropriate by the schools and colleges concerned. The key terms should be derived from the Task set by AQA and from the hypothesis or key question being used to focus the investigation.

Once a student applies these concepts/processes appropriately within the methodology, they can access Level 2. For example, if one of the key terms was ‘land use’ then this would be defined in the introduction and the student would have a method of collecting data relating to land use, and they would use this term when describing and justifying their method. 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 students must have used their key concepts/processes accurately and appropriately throughout the entire body of the work, and located their study in detail.

The most obvious error made in relation to Geographical Understanding was the failure of students to complete the Level 1 requirements. Whilst the investigations seen were certainly geographical in terms of their content and the vocabulary used, the students 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 criteria. There were instances of key concept/processes being implicit within the investigations but the criteria require students to make their use of key concepts/processes explicit. One way of achieving this is for students to highlight each key concept/process every time they use it within the work. Then the students, their teachers and the moderators can clearly judge how effective they have been in applying these concepts/processes to their investigations.

It was not unusual for some students to identify and define a range of key terms, often six or more such terms, and then fail to use them within any part of their investigation other than the introduction.

Methodology

This section was tackled well by students with the majority gaining marks at Level 2 or above. The Specification requires students to use one clear hypothesis or question to focus the investigation. This allows students access to the full range of marks whilst producing investigations that are well organised and close to the guidance of 2000 words. There were instances of investigations being based upon multiple-hypotheses, or a series of sub-questions, but these tended to become weak in the Interpretation criteria as students had too much material to process, analyse and interpret.

Once students 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. The quality of the description of the methods used to collect data varied considerably. It is recommended that the students write the descriptions of their data collection methods in more detail than the justifications. Moderators saw descriptions as basic as ‘I carried out traffic counts’ when the student could easily have included timings, locations, durations of the counts and of the sampling process(es) used.

Level 3 marks proved to be more difficult for students to access and for schools and colleges to mark. 'Originality' is not part of the assessment criteria for Methodology. Instead, the descriptor makes it clear that students 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 students to use. Moderators do not expect to see totally original data collection techniques within all of the investigations making up a sample. Instead they expect to see a range of methods being planned by students from schools and colleges and where similar or the same data collection methods are used by students, different locations, times and sample sizes should be apparent. Secondary data can meet the Level 3 requirement here.

The justification of the data collection methods used is another important feature of the Level 3 criteria. Where investigations are teacher directed, plans must be made for Level 3 opportunities so that students are not limited to the top of Level 2. Where students 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 investigations and these did not always develop the original investigation or help the student 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 clearly linked to the task and have provided data that have actually been used by the students within their investigations. Describing and justifying methods in the Methodology section does not earn credit unless there is evidence to show that data were collected by these methods, and the data were then used in the interpretation section of the investigation. Examples were seen where schools and colleges awarded marks to students for describing a particular data collection technique yet no results relating to that method were provided or interpretations given. Moderators also saw examples of students being awarded Level 3 marks when the teacher had clearly stated that there had been no individually planned data collection methods within the investigation.

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

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

Data Presentation

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

To reach Level 3, students must first fulfil the requirements for Levels 1 and 2. These require the students to produce a range of presentation techniques, which can be basic but they must be appropriate and most should be complete and accurate. Some students only employed one or two basic techniques, but repeated them several times over. Duplication of basic techniques gains no credit for the student. 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, students can access Level 3 by producing 'more complex' presentation techniques. These high order techniques, if completed accurately, may include; choropleth maps, scatter graphs with line of best fit, proportional flow lines, located graphs, well annotated (not simply labelled) photographs, cross-sections drawn with due consideration to the scales used, dispersion graphs and so on. Simple graphs produced using ICT are not Level 3 presentation techniques. Moderators saw examples of land use maps and radar graphs being credited as Level 3 presentation skills which do not meet the Level 3 criteria. Some statistical techniques, with all working shown, can also be Level 3 presentation skills.

The use of ICT has a direct bearing on the marks awarded in this section. There must be at least one clear ICT contribution to the investigation, excluding text, if the student is to be awarded any marks for Presentation. Without evidence of ICT the student cannot be awarded any marks in this part of the assessment criteria.

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 students gave descriptions without reference to the data they had collected. Schools and colleges often over-marked these descriptive accounts of the results.

Part of the Level 2 descriptor requires students '**to analyse their results by means of basic numerical data manipulation**'. In the best investigations the students 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 their original hypothesis or question.

Schools and colleges sometimes credited students with Level 3 marks when the analysis was poor or missing altogether and where no links between data sets were evident. Links to the hypothesis are usually credited within conclusions.

Evaluation

For Level 1 in this strand of the assessment criteria students are required to reflect on the effectiveness of their data collection methods and suggest possible improvements or alternative methods. For Level 2 they must go further by considering how specific problems relating to their methods could have impacted upon the quality of the results obtained. For Level 3 students must assess the impact of these issues on the validity of their conclusions.

In the best Controlled Assessments seen, evaluation statements were detailed and specifically related to the investigation rather than being vague and generic. Furthermore, instead of discussing the three components of the criteria separately, students were able to link them. They achieved this by identifying specific problems with their methods that compromised the accuracy of a particular set of results and impacted upon their conclusions to such an extent that they would therefore have questionable validity.

In the weaker investigations, the evaluation was either missing or covered very briefly. Here the students 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 student to provide an appraisal of the effectiveness of the investigation and to suggest how improvements can be made.

Recommendations

Many schools and colleges are enabling students of all abilities to produce interesting, relevant and, at times, exceptional investigations of small-scale issues. These schools and colleges are also assessing their students accurately using the assessment criteria.

Where schools and colleges are experiencing difficulties, there is support available from Controlled Assessment Advisors and this support can be arranged by contacting the Subject Office at AQA.

Most schools and colleges have become familiar with the assessment criteria and they use the statements within each level to plan their investigations. Support material provided by AQA gives guidance in terms of structuring the investigations and clarifies issues relating to the assessment criteria and the Levels of Control involved with the Controlled Assessment. This can be found on e-AQA Secure Key Materials.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion