



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2011**

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 second year of Controlled Assessments and, as the GCSE course is now modular, centres were able to enter work from candidates other than those in year 11. As the entry for this component was relatively low in 2010, the majority of 67 000 candidates moderated were year 11 students.

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. Controlled Assessment 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 with the only time restrictions being 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 legacy coursework seen in previous years. The Controlled Assessment investigations often had a very clear focus because they were shorter in length than legacy coursework investigations. In the best investigations, the geographical concepts and processes studied were clearly evident and were applied accurately throughout the work. 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.

The majority of the work seen was teacher directed, but 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 accurately and consistently so the samples of Controlled Assessment investigations were within tolerance. The marking criteria were clearly understood by the teachers in these centres, and the progression evident within the criteria had informed their planning. There were, however, a number of centres out of tolerance because one or more studies had not been accurately marked or moderated within the centres concerned. In some instances centres had planned their Controlled Assessment as though it was legacy coursework and, as a result, the work completed was not a good match to the new assessment criteria. One centre marked their Controlled Assessments out of 75 instead of 60 and so they were required to re-mark the work of all of their candidates.

Administration

Where there are no more than 20 candidates, centres should send all of the 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 moderator. Examinations Officers could assist the moderation process by ensuring that all of the required forms are sent with the work sampled.

There were too 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; centres must make alterations clear when encoding the Centre Mark Sheets. Moderators also saw errors in the addition of marks awarded to candidates, and this sometimes had an impact on the sampling process so additional work had to be requested.

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 which can lead to delays.

Candidates' work should not be sent in bulky folders, and it would be helpful if work could be removed from plastic wallets. Candidate names and numbers must be recorded on the front of the Candidate Record Forms.

Task Choices

The most frequently attempted tasks were those based on Changing Urban Environments and Tourism. These two tasks accounted for more than 50% of the work moderated this year. Water on the Land and the Coastal Zone were the next most popular choices for centres to tackle with their candidates. Centres successfully contextualised the chosen task so that their candidates were able to produce valid investigations. There were no reported instances of centres deviating from the task to any significant degree, and there were no examples of centres selecting a task from the incorrect year of submission.

The Investigations

Many investigations exceeded the guidance of 2000 words and some were far too long. 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, there was no evidence that any centres had breached the 20 hours time limit. Some of the time record sheets included with work sent for moderation indicated that candidates at some centres had actually been given no more than 10 hours to complete their Controlled Assessments, and this did not give them sufficient time to access the full mark range. Investigations should be kept as close to 2000 words as possible and candidates must have their full allocation of time to complete this task.

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 quite understandable and perfectly acceptable.

Teacher annotations on the work indicating Levels and marks were very helpful to moderators, and it is recommended that all centres do this for the sample sent for moderation.

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 containing a number of different requirements. **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 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 was where centres credited a candidate at the top of a Level when the evidence was that the candidate has only just accessed that particular Level. When this approach was used across more than one section of the assessment criteria, it resulted in the centre marks being outside 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 awarding of marks within a Level; it cannot be used to move a candidate into or out of a Level.

To be successful in Geographical Understanding, the geographical concepts underpinning the work must be identified and defined and then 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 four or five 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 candidates apply 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 candidate would have a method of collecting data relating to land use, and 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 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 in relation to Geographical Understanding was the failure of candidates to complete the Level 1 requirement. Whilst the investigations seen were clearly geographical in terms of their 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 the candidates, 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 candidates 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. Some of the terms seen were incorrectly defined or were not clear.

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 investigations that are well organised and close to the guidance of 2000 words. There were 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 could be awarded. The quality of the descriptions of the methods used to collect data varied considerably. It is recommended that the candidates write the descriptions and their methods in more detail than the justifications. Moderators saw descriptions as basic as 'I carried out traffic counts' when the candidate could easily have included timings, locations, durations of the counts and the reasons for these features of the sampling process.

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 of 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 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 candidates are not limited 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 candidates 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 candidates 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 used 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 provided or interpretations given. Moderators also saw examples of candidates 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 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 Level Control. Candidates who leave the evaluation of their methods until the Evaluation section of their investigation avoid duplication of key points, and they tend to link their methods and results more effectively.

Failure to include any primary data within the investigation limited candidates to Level 1 marks in this part of the assessment criteria. There were examples of candidates being awarded Level 2 marks when their investigations contained no primary data.

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 the candidates to produce a range of presentation techniques, most of which must be appropriate, complete and accurate. Some candidates only employed one or two favourite techniques, with one candidate producing 31 bar graphs. Duplication of basic techniques gains no credit for the candidate. 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 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 bar graphs and pie charts being credited as Level 3 presentation skills. Statistical techniques, with all working shown, can also be Level 3 Presentation skills. There were instances seen this year of statistical techniques being credited at Level 3 when the calculations were incorrect.

The use of ICT within the enquiry 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 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. Some centres appeared to be unaware of the requirement for ICT within the Presentation section of the assessment 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 and valid conclusions.

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. Links to the hypothesis are usually credited within conclusions.

Evaluation

For Level 1 in this assessment objective candidates need to reflect on the effectiveness of 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 issues on the validity of their conclusions.

In the best Controlled Assessments 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, candidates were able to link the components. They achieved this by identifying specific problems with their methods that compromised the accuracy of a particular set of their 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 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 Controlled Assessment Advisors whose details can be confirmed 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.

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