AQA

**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2011**

Geography B   **40354**

(Specification 4035)

Unit 4: Local investigation including fieldwork and geographical issue Investigation

Report on the Examination

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 candidates moderated were year 11 students.

The options available for centres are now limited in that there are four tasks set by AQA for the Local Investigation including fieldwork, and two for the Geographical Issues Investigation. One task must be selected for the Local Investigation, and fieldwork must be evident within the work so centres need to contextualise this task to meet local circumstances and opportunities. Another task must be chosen for the Geographical Issues Investigation. The two tasks are assessed separately but the marks combine to give each candidate a single Controlled Assessment mark. 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 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. Access to ICT facilities was limited for some centres, and so moderators often saw work that was hand written with limited ICT contributions.

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 clearly evident and applied accurately throughout 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, particularly in relation to the Geographical Issues task.

As with the legacy coursework, 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 tasks.

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.

Administration

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

There were also 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 completed correctly and sent with the work sampled.

There were also many instances of inaccurate recording of marks on the Centre Mark Sheets. Some candidates had two different marks recorded where errors had been over-written and both marks encoded. This affects the sampling process so centres must make alterations clear when encoding the Centre Mark Sheets. The moderator often saw errors in the addition of marks awarded to candidates, and this sometimes had an impact on the sampling process, meaning additional work had to be requested.

Most centres carried out the administrative requirements with commendable accuracy and efficiency, and this certainly assists 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.

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.

Local Fieldwork Investigation

Task Choices

The most popular tasks were those based on The Coastal Environment, the Urban Environment and Global Tourism. Centres successfully contextualised the chosen task so that their candidates were able to produce valid investigations.

The Investigations

Many investigations exceeded the guidance of 1200 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. Investigations should be kept as close to 1200 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 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 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 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 the 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 credit 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 is used across more than one section of the assessment criteria, it leads to the centre marks being outside the tolerance set by the Board.

Geographical Understanding

In the majority of cases, investigations were well organised and underpinned by established geographical concepts that related to the taught Specification.

To be successful in Geographical Understanding, the geographic 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 two or

three such terms. Extensive glossaries or excessive coverage of established theory from textbooks are not required. 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.   The concepts/processes must then be applied appropriately throughout the interpretations, the conclusions and the evaluation.   To gain all six marks in this section, the candidates should have used their key concepts/processes accurately throughout the entire body of the work.

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 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 specialised terms is given in the Interpretation section of the assessment objectives. There were instances of key concepts/processes being implicit within the investigations, and some allowance could be made for this, but candidates would be advised to make the use of 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 moderator 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 investigations that are well organised and close to the guidance of 1200 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 would be carried out, and provided a clear description of the valid data collection methods to be used, at least one of which involved the collection of primary data, then 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 of their methods in more detail than the justifications. Candidates could include locations used, sample sizes, sampling processes, durations of counts (for traffic/pedestrians) and timings relevant to the methods used.

For this Specification, there is no requirement for candidates to devise one or more methods of data collection.   It is the justification of all data collection methods used which makes up the key part of the Level 3 criteria.   The work must also be well organised and planned if maximum marks are to be considered.

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 of results collected by means of the methods stated, with these results being used within 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 presented or interpretations given 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 should be completing these sections under High Level Control. Candidates who leave the evaluation of the 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 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 some centres overmarked 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 candidate to produce a limited range of presentation techniques which must be appropriate and accurate. 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.

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.

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.

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. Some centres appeared to be unaware of the requirement for ICT within the Presentation section of the marking criteria.

Data Interpretation

This section continues to be a very powerful discriminator, with progression through the Levels being determined by the key 'triggers' of description/explanation, analysis and detailed analysis with valid conclusions.

The main weakness seen was where candidates gave descriptions without reference to the data they had collected. Centres often overmarked 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 they reached valid conclusions (based on evidence) that related to the original hypothesis.

Centres sometimes credited candidates with Level 3 marks when the analysis was poor or missing and no conclusions had been reached.

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

Evaluation

For Level 1 in this assessment objective candidates need to reflect on their methods and suggest possible improvements. For Level 2 they 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 finally assess the impact of these issues 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, candidates 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

section of their results and that the conclusions, which were based on these results, would therefore have questionable validity.

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.

Geographical Issue Investigation

Task Choices
There were two options provided by the Examination Board, one based on Energy in the 21st century and the other based on Water – a precious resource. The centres moderated this year tackled the options equally with neither Energy nor Water dominating the samples seen.

The Investigations
Many investigations exceeded the guidance of 800 words. This was particularly evident where candidates had access to ICT for the majority, or all, of the time allowed for the task. Some candidates used a 'cut and paste' approach to the investigation and so material from websites was simply downloaded without consideration of the suitability of that material to the task set. This meant that some of the work seen had no relevance to the task or it was incorrect.

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

The Marking Criteria
The assessment objectives contain some similarities to those used for legacy GCSE coursework. Each of the assessment objectives contains three Levels with each Level statement requiring a development from the previous, lower scoring, Level.

Research Evidence

Within this section of the marking criteria, candidates are required to demonstrate that they have used research evidence to investigate the task set. Typically the research evidence seen came from websites, textbooks and atlases. Some candidates produced their report and provided a bibliography of websites and other sources used at the end of their investigation. These bibliographies were often rather long with more than ten sources being listed. However, it was not possible to determine which sources had actually provided relevant material for the investigation. Other candidates quoted the sources used alongside the material presented, and it is this approach that is of greatest value to the moderator.

Geographical Understanding and Quality of Written Communication

It is the range and effective use of geographical terminology that determines the marks awarded in this part of the marking criteria. Candidates were often very successful in achieving maximum marks here, with appropriate geographical terms being applied correctly throughout the investigations. There is no need for candidates to identify and define key terms for this task. In some centres, candidates failed to identify and define key terms for the Local Investigation Task (where there is a specific requirement to do so) yet they provided definitions on the Issues Task where this is not part of the assessment criteria.

Presentation

Most investigations were very well organised with text being clear and appropriate. The best examples of these investigations had graphs, maps and images integrated effectively within the body of the work. At Level 1, candidates only used basic skills of presentation and there may have been no ICT contributions evident within the work. For Level 2 marks to be awarded, there must be ICT contributions to the final report and the skills of presentation must be appropriate. At Level 3, the final

report must be presented to a very high standard and be very well organised, reading like an essay if a continuous prose style is adopted.

Values and Attitudes

Candidates often covered this section very effectively. When examining the issue concerned, the views of interest groups have to be considered. The views of local people, local governments, national governments, charities and pressure groups were often made clear and many candidates produced this material in the form of a table. Simply producing evidence of these different views is not sufficient to access Level 3 marks. The material must be directly relevant to the investigation and be presented very clearly and effectively.

Some candidates used a 'cut and paste' approach to this part of the investigation, but the lack of care and consideration when selecting the material meant that the values and attitudes presented did not develop the task sufficiently to earn marks at Level 3.

Conclusions

Here candidates are expected to reach overall conclusions in relation to the task being investigated. At Level 1 the conclusions may be very simple and lack substantiation, and they may be just one or two sentences. At Level 2, the conclusions would be clear and developed from the material presented within the investigation. For Level 3, the conclusions would all be valid and be clearly based on evidence within the investigation, so they could be covered within a paragraph that contains direct reference back to sources presented within the body of the work. This would provide an effective ending to the investigation.

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 Controlled Assessment Advisors whose details can be confirmed by contacting the Subject Office at AQA.

Centres must become familiar with the marking criteria, and the statements found within each Level should be used to plan the investigations to be undertaken by their candidates. 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