



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Geography B

40354

(Specification 4035)

**Unit 4: Local investigation including fieldwork
and geographical issue Investigation**

Report on the Examination

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Full and Short Course

Centre Assessed Controlled Assessment 40354

General

This was the third year for submitting Controlled Assessments and, as the GCSE course is currently modular, schools and colleges entered work from students other than those in year 11. The majority of the 14,500 students moderated this year were year 11 students.

The options available for schools and colleges are 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 schools and colleges 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 combined to give each student a single Controlled Assessment mark. Controlled Assessment Advisors are allocated to schools and colleges to provide advice and guidance 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.

With the Controlled Assessments, students must 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 schools and colleges. Access to ICT facilities was limited for some schools and colleges, and so moderators often saw work that was hand written with limited ICT contributions.

The best Controlled Assessment investigations had a very clear focus because they were limited to a single hypothesis or key question. The geographical concepts and processes studied were clearly evident and applied accurately throughout many of the investigations. 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, particularly in relation to the Geographical Issues task.

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 schools and colleges were able to apply the assessment criteria accurately and consistently so the samples of Controlled Assessment investigations from these schools and colleges were 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 the planning of the work carried out. There were, however, a number of schools and colleges out of tolerance because one or more investigations had not been accurately marked or 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 within 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, schools and colleges should send all of 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 of the required forms are completed correctly and sent with the work sampled.

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

Some 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. This can lead to delays in the moderation process.

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.

Local Fieldwork Investigation

Task Choices

The most popular tasks were those based on The Coastal Environment, the Urban Environment and Global Tourism. Schools and colleges successfully contextualised their chosen task so that their students 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 students 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.

The moderators saw investigations that were well organised and superbly presented. ICT access may have been a problem for some schools and colleges 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 schools and colleges do this for the sample sent for moderation. This helps the moderators to see where teachers have credited evidence of the Assessment Criteria being met.

The Assessment Criteria

Each strand of the assessment criteria contains three levels with each level statement containing a number of different requirements. **Students 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 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, is not a 'best-fit' model; it requires evidence of progression through the level statements of each strand of the criteria.

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

Geographical Understanding

In the majority of cases, investigations were well organised and underpinned by established geographical concepts or processes that related to the taught Specification. 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 2 or 3 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 a student 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 6 marks in this section, the students should have used their key concepts/processes accurately throughout the entire body of the work.

The most obvious error made by schools and colleges in relation to Geographical Understanding was the failure of their students to complete the Level 1 requirement. Whilst the investigations seen were clearly geographical in terms of 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 specialised terms is given in the Interpretation section of the assessment criteria. There were instances of key concepts/processes being implicit within the investigations but students are required to make the 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. Now the students, their teachers and the moderator can clearly judge how effective they have been in applying these concepts/processes to their investigations.

Methodology

This strand was tackled well by students with the majority gaining marks at Level 2 or above. The Specification requires students to use one hypothesis or key 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 1200 words. There were some instances of investigations being based upon multiple-hypotheses or a series of sub-questions, but these tended to become weak in relation to the Interpretation strand as students had too much material to process, analyse and interpret.

Once students had identified a question or issue, stated how the investigation would be carried out and provided a clear description of the 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 students write the descriptions of their methods in more detail than the justifications. Students could include locations used, sample sizes, sampling processes, durations of counts (eg for traffic/pedestrians) and timings relevant to the methods used.

For this Specification, there is no requirement for students 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 students 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, and with these results being used within 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 were presented or interpretations given 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 should be completing these sections under High Level Control. Students who leave the evaluation of the 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 marks in Level 1 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 some schools and colleges over-marked the work of their students in this strand.

To reach Level 3 students must first fulfil the requirements for Levels 1 and 2. These require the students to produce a range of basic presentation techniques, most of which must be appropriate, complete 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 student into or out of a level.

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 and dispersion graphs. Simple graphs produced using ICT are not Level 3 presentation techniques.

The use of ICT within the work has a direct bearing on the marks awarded in this stand. There must be at least one clear ICT contribution to the investigation, excluding text, if the student is to be awarded any marks. If there is no evidence of ICT the student cannot gain any marks in this part of the assessment 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 students gave descriptions of their results without reference to the data they had collected. Schools and colleges often over-marked these descriptive accounts of the interpretations 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 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 and no conclusions had been reached.

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

Evaluation

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

In the best investigations, the evaluation statements were quite detailed and specific to the investigation rather than being vague and generic. Furthermore, instead of discussing the three components of the criteria separately students proceeded to link them. 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 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 usually very basic and made no reference to results or conclusions.

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

Geographical Issue Investigation

Task Choices

There were two options provided by AQA, one based on Energy in the 21st century and the other based on Water – a precious resource. Approximately twice as many students tackled Energy rather than Water this year.

The Investigations

Many investigations exceeded the guidance of 800 words. This was particularly evident where students had access to ICT for the majority, or all, of the time allowed for the task. Some students used a 'cut and paste' approach to the investigation where 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 the report did not 'flow' but simply had a series of unlinked ideas or quotes.

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

The Assessment Criteria

Each strand of the assessment criteria contains three levels with each level requiring a development from the previous, lower scoring, level statement.

Research Evidence

Within this section of the assessment criteria, students 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 students provided a bibliography of websites and other sources used at the end of their investigation. These bibliographies were often rather long and it was not always possible to determine which sources had actually provided relevant material for the investigation. Other students quoted the sources used alongside the material presented, and it is this approach that is of greatest value to the moderator. There were some excellent referencing systems being used by some schools and colleges.

Geographical Understanding and QWC

It is the range and effective use of geographical terminology, along with QWC, that determines the marks awarded in this part of the assessment criteria. Students were often very successful in achieving maximum marks here, with appropriate geographical terms being applied correctly throughout the investigations and the report being written accurately and fluently. There is no

requirement for students to identify and define key terms for this task. In some schools and colleges, students 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. Some schools and colleges did not appear to assess QWC within this strand.

Presentation

Most investigations were very well organised with presentation skills being clear and appropriate. The best examples of Presentation within these investigations had graphs, maps and images integrated effectively within the body of the work. At Level 1, students 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, so illustrations and figures would be used to enhance the text and be inserted at the most appropriate points within the report. At Level 3, the final report must be presented to a very high standard and be very well organised, with figures being complete with titles and integrated effectively, eg ‘..as shown on the map of India, figure 1 below’.

Values and Attitudes

Students 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 students 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. Two opposing views are required for students to access Level 2 and the views of a third interest group are required for Level 3 with detailed coverage of the values and attitudes involved.

Some students 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 above Level 2.

At Level 3, the best students would identify specific interest groups, state the viewpoint or stance of each group, often supported with quotes, and they then used their own words to develop the points being made.

Conclusions

Within this strand students 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 just consist of one or two sentences. At Level 2 the conclusions would be clear and developed from, and linked to, the material presented within the investigation. For Level 3 the conclusions would all be valid and clearly based on evidence within the investigation. Such conclusions would typically be covered within a paragraph or two that contained direct reference to sources presented within the body of the work.

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 assessing their students accurately using the criteria set out AQA. 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.

Schools and colleges are becoming familiar with the assessment criteria and the statements found within each level are clearly being used to plan the investigations undertaken by the students. 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