

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel GCSE in
Geography B (5GB04)

Unit 4: Researching Geography

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Summary comments

May 2016 has witnessed the sixth cycle of moderation for controlled assessments (CA) in GCSE Geography. Candidates are required to produce a piece of work over about 20 hours under both limited and high control. Specification revision for assessment in 2014 introduced a stricter enforcement of a 2000 maximum word length. For 2015 the rules were modified slightly: words included in tables, graphs, quotations and references do not need to be included in the word total (but tables must not be used for extended writing as a method of exceeding the word limit) - p 40 of the Specification (Issue 5).

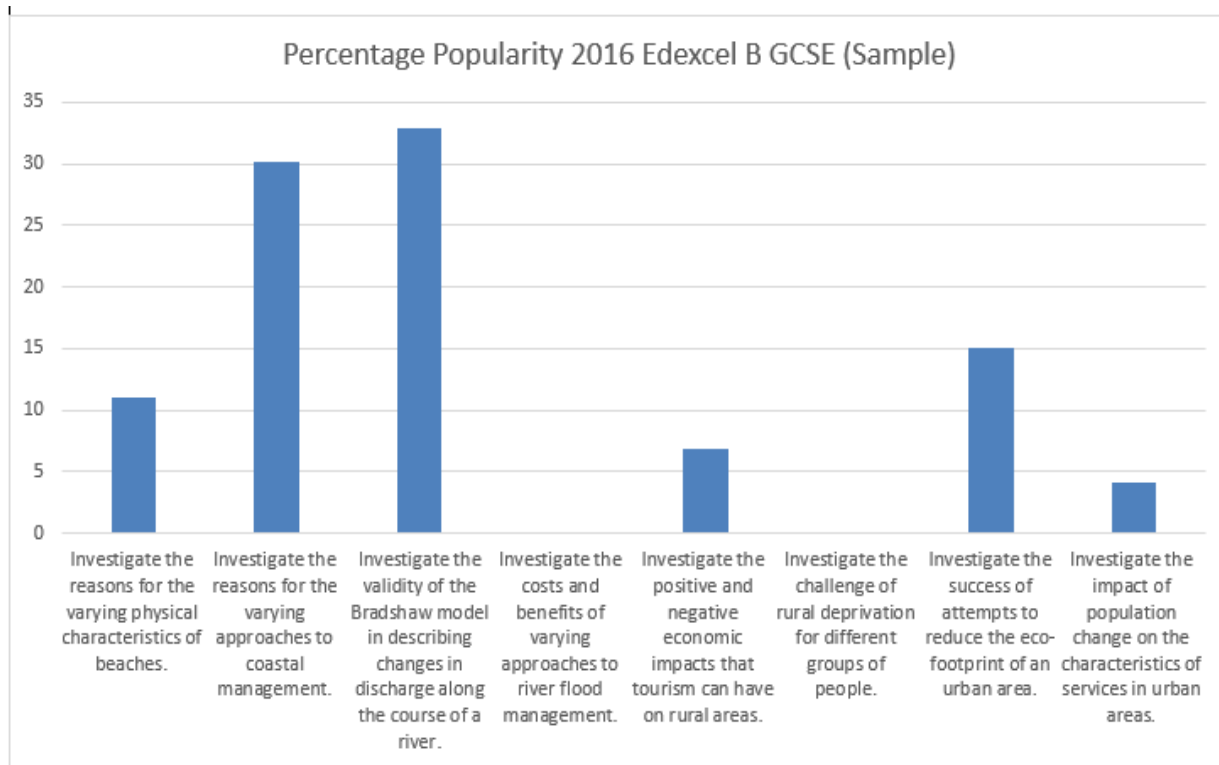
As in previous series, the work is based around one of eight tasks set by Pearson / Edexcel (four broadly physical and four broadly human in nature) and must include both fieldwork and research. Centres choose their own topic(s). The vast majority of Centres use only one task, but a few offer students a choice through different fieldwork experiences.

Once again this year, a key issue remains the appropriate contextualisation of the task so that the controlled assessment is both manageable and still closely linked to the main focus. A worrying proportion of Centres are still replicating exactly the same fieldwork that they have done for many years and failing to adapt to a different task, despite being given previous advice to modify their approach. The "how and why" components of tasks were rarely considered. The 2016 entry witnessed a strong preference for the coastal management and the Bradshaw's model (see Figure 1). Overall however, the human tasks remain less popular which is a shame given the potential for accessible and local fieldwork opportunities.

This may be down to the fact that the human titles seem less "obvious" or it may be due to staffing choice, wanting to "do Bradshaw's". There is now much evidence that a majority of Centres are reluctant to change their choice (and sometimes approach) to task delivery. Whilst this is perfectly acceptable within the Regulatory framework, from an educational perspective there may be numerous benefits to consider changing tasks more often, not least to refresh the fieldwork.

AS in last series, it is pleasing to report that for the majority, the newly revised mark scheme (2014) did not present too many challenges. But again, Moderators reported that many, if not most, higher ability candidates did in fact exceed the word limit (or totally disregarded it). This was largely because their introductions contained poorly connected and often unnecessary theory or background information. In this respect, teachers have only partially adapted to the new mark scheme as the two sections which were sometimes over-marked, were data presentation (lack of complex techniques) and evaluation (still of the "wish I had tried harder" variety, even in 2016).

Figure 1



Particular comments from the Moderating Team in 2016

Administration:

Administration was similar to 2015 and a good proportion of work arrived on time (15th May 2016) and carrying the correct documentation. Centres are however reminded that:

1. Moderators still found a number of errors in arithmetic in some work. It is essential that work is correctly added-up and those marks are accurately transferred to the OPTEMs / electronic sheets. If moderators find that work is not correct they will have to contact the Centre and request an adjustment. This creates additional burden for all those involved. Please note that the OPTEMs should only be used to record the raw candidate marks (out of 50), not a percentage or any other conversion.
2. Candidates should firmly attach their work together (no plastic wallets or A4 folders/wallets please) and complete the correct cover sheet indicating: specification, candidate and centre names and numbers, data of exam cycle and task title. On some occasions the title-space was left blank so moderators were unsure as to what the focus of the work might have been.
3. Both the teacher and candidate must sign the coversheet - always. This is a requirement of submission and work cannot be moderated without correct authentication. Once again there seems to have been some confusion in 2016 regarding correct coversheets. Issue 5 of the Specification (late 2014) has an updated Declaration Sheet (Appendix 4, p 72). This should be used for the final 2017 entry. The correct version can now be downloaded from the Pearson / Edexcel website, under "Forms and Guidance".

4. Highest and lowest work must be included, even if it doesn't form part of the original (*) sample. If there are multiple pieces of work with the same highest / lowest marks then please just send one example at that mark.

Comments on the quality of marking:

Moderators commented that marking was generally fair, reliable and accurate. Very much maintaining the standards set by last year's qualification.

Once again, some candidates, especially in the lower range of marks, seemed to be marked somewhat harshly. Equally there was evidence of some centres being too optimistic for candidates around the A and A* grades (37-45 range especially). Thank you to all those centres who annotated the candidate mark sheet. This makes the moderation process easier; it also indicates internal moderation which larger centres should be carrying out.

Comments relating to particular sections:

a: Purpose of investigation

There was evidence of planning an appropriate fieldwork exercise (or exercises) which tied neatly with the original task question in which there was due thought and consideration of how to make that task more manageable for candidates. Many of whom had included sub-questions or hypotheses which were relevant to the task question. At the upper end of Level 2 candidates had included a number of maps at a range of scales with appropriate annotations to support locational commentary. Those candidates scoring at Level 3 had provided contextualisation through their own research to put the study into context and to explain why had chosen that location. Those Centres which have candidates scoring at the lower end of the mark range might wish to tighten the focus of their investigations since some were too broad for the weaker candidates to access the upper mark band(s) and they might wish to use curriculum time to get candidates to devise their own hypotheses/sub-questions so that they have more ownership of the investigation at hand. There was some evidence of over-marking, particularly where contextualisation was too weak or absent; candidates didn't really demonstrate that they knew what they were doing or why. Where the focus of candidate's work was not tied to the original question, this impeded candidate performance throughout the later aspects of the investigation

b: Methods of data collection

Many of the methods of data collection demonstrated by Centres were appropriate to the task and there was much thought of what data candidates needed to collect. However, there was evidence from a minority of Centres where methods were not entirely appropriate; for example, there were some Centres who were conducting litter surveys to answer the economic impacts of tourism question. Candidates were able to succinctly describe the methods they used to collect data and the very best made those explicit links to their original sub-questions (or hypotheses) using geographical vocabulary appropriate to the task. There was some evidence of over-marking by Centres, particularly where this justification of methods didn't explore that justification. The use of a tabular format enabled candidates to make evaluative commentaries on those methods, which aided them later in the study. GIS was used appropriately by the strongest to locate study area(s). Risk assessments were accurate and appropriate to the task, but there were some that were too generic in nature. There is still some reluctance to use secondary data to support candidate's work (it can of course help develop the question and focus). For example, questions related to river discharge (or other river dynamics) could have used

meteorological information or refer to the British Geological Survey; this is an area where some Centres should develop further. Overall this was generally marked accurately.

c: Methods of data presentation

Generally, this was marked accurately, but the issue of sophistication remains (see box). Many Centres were reliant on using the traditional methods of data presentation using Excel or similar spreadsheet software. There is still a tendency for some candidates however, to present discrete data using line graphs, too which is technically inappropriate. Some beach profiles for instance were presented using Excel, which would have been better if they had been drawn by hand using better, more realistic x-y scales for instance. Nevertheless, there are an increasing number of centres who are becoming confident in using GIS (or other two-step processes) to open the door to the upper mark band. Centres do need to spend a little more time thinking about the data that they are intending candidates to collect and then think exactly how this data could be best presented to secure all available marks.

Sophistication

Sophistication may often combine two techniques, process or operations, e.g. scatter and best fit, proportional symbols or well annotated photos / and or maps, e.g. to show location with inset photos. Other examples may include:

Dispersion diagrams

Box and whisker plot to show the spread of data

Kite diagrams for a vegetation transect

Isoline maps, e.g. isochrone for travel times, isovels for velocity etc.

Choropleth maps / density shading

Gain / loss bar charts

Compound, divided, percentage and proportional bar charts

Flow lines and proportional arrows / symbols

Located and / or proportional pies / bars etc

Radar plots

Base maps with some annotation / details.

High quality sketch with annotations that explain OR positives and negatives

Beach / river profiles with accurate scales

d: Analysis and conclusions

As per last year, this section remains the most accurately marked with good use of the mark scheme. Those candidates scoring in the upper mark bands had been able to accurately interpret their data and explore those links between data sets, and directly answer their original task question(s) or hypotheses. There was evidence of some increasingly confident use of geographical vocabulary and theories which supported their studies. It is this step that Centres with candidates scoring in Level 2 ought to explore further, rather than simply relying on descriptive commentary with some generalised attempts at analysis.

e: Evaluation

Performance in this section between Centres seems to vary greatly. When executed well candidates often scored heavily, with thought applied to the reliability of the methods, the accuracy of the results and then the validity of conclusions. Many candidates made appropriate commentary on how the study could be improved and how this might impact on the validity of the conclusions. Where it had not been completed well, candidates made generalised comments about the problems they faced in completing a fieldwork exercise without any thought given to other evaluative aspects. Generally marking in this section was accurate but with a few instances of over-generosity potentially as a result of teachers not giving due thought to what this evaluative commentary entails.

Use of GIS

Moderators reporting increasing take-up of more sophisticated GIS and visualisation techniques. A growing number of centres are using approaches that allowed students' to plot their results on digital overlays using software such as Google Maps, Google Earth, ArcGIS Online and Aegis. It was also acknowledged, that for some centres, access to ICT remains a considerable challenge, but Centres are reminded that GIS and visualisation remains an important part of the controlled assessment. It will also feature in the new 2016 GCSE Geography Specifications

Pearson / Edexcel has a support document concerning GIS which is available from their website. There are also GIS / Visualisation courses supporting the use of this technology being offered by The Geographical Association (GA), FSC and the RGS.

Closing Comments

There remains considerable variation in the quality and approach to CA by centres. It was sometimes worrying to still see Centres, for instance, who seemed to have partially ignored the task set and carried on doing the same fieldwork and write-up style as they had done for legacy coursework or previous years of CA. Some Centres were also unaware of the need to localise and contextualise the task - this is necessary since many of the tasks are simply too big / unmanageable to be tackled in their original state. The tasks are deliberately set in this way so that centres can have flexibility in terms of choice of location and fieldwork focus. Another issue is choosing appropriate aim(s) to link to the task brief as many students struggled to link the two. Many did loosely related aims e.g. Bradshaw's model or struggled to relate quality surveys such as clone town to the question. There is more support available on the Pearson / Edexcel website. One Moderator also commented that in some instances teachers had sacrificed individualism and flair for getting the marks for most students and so all the low control aspects of the work read too similarly. Training and support is planned for events are planned for in 2016-2017 which will look in more detail at some of these aspects.

Once again I would like to remind Centres that a successful piece of CA that is well designed and well thought-out fieldwork generally yields and outcome which is relevant, rigorous and fit-for purpose.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link: <http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

