

GCSE

Geography B

90353 Local investigation including fieldwork and geographical issue investigation

Report on the Examination

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General

This was the sixth year of Controlled Assessments and almost all of the 14,000 candidates moderated this year were year 11 students.

The options available for centres 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, Task 1, and fieldwork must be evident within the work, so centres need to contextualise this task to meet local circumstances and opportunities. A different task must be chosen for the Geographical Issues Investigation, Task 2. The two tasks are assessed separately but the marks combined to give each candidate a single Controlled Assessment mark. Controlled Assessment Advisors are allocated to centres to provide advice and guidance in relation to the appropriateness of tasks and the data collection methods involved. They also help centres understand and interpret the assessment criteria and the Levels of Control involved.

With the Controlled Assessments, candidates 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 centres. None of the work can be completed at home.

The best Controlled Assessment investigations addressing Task 1 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 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.

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 assessment criteria accurately and consistently so the samples of Controlled Assessment investigations from these centres were within tolerance. The assessment 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 investigations had not been accurately assessed within the centres concerned.

Administration

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

There were 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 sample.

There were many instances of inaccurate recording of marks on the Centre Mark Sheets. Some candidates had no marks recorded and others had two different marks recorded where errors had been over-written and both marks encoded. This affected the sampling process so centres must make alterations clear when encoding the Centre Mark Sheets. The moderators often saw errors

in the addition of marks awarded to candidates and this also had an impact on the sampling process so additional work had to be requested.

Most 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. 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.

Task 1 Local Fieldwork Investigation

Task Choices

The most popular tasks were those based on The Coastal Environment (23%), the Urban Environment (27%) and Global Tourism (almost 50%). Centres successfully contextualised their chosen task so that their candidates were able to produce valid investigations. There were no instances of centres selecting the task from the incorrect year for submission.

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. There was no evidence of centres exceeding the time limit for this task.

The moderators saw investigations that were well organised and superbly 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 Assessment Criteria

Each strand of the assessment criteria contains three Levels with each Level containing a number of different requirements. **Candidates 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 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 assessment criteria, therefore, should not be seen as 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 centres credited a candidate at the top of a Level when the evidence was that the candidate had only just accessed that particular Level. When this approach was used across more than one strand of the assessment criteria, it resulted in the centre 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 (key terms) 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. Only two or three such key concepts/processes/terms are required for this strand of the assessment criteria.

Level 1 explicitly requires candidates to identify and define the key geographical concepts and/or processes (the key terms) 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 (with more than 24 key terms identified and defined) or excessive coverage of established theory from textbooks were seen at times but these are not required. The key concepts/processes must be directly relevant to the investigation and this part of the controlled assessment is completed under Low Control so teachers can ensure that inappropriate key terms are not considered. This year some of the inappropriate key terms seen included: questionnaire, sampling, map, survey and hypothesis.

Once a candidate applies these concepts/processes explicitly and appropriately within the methodology, they can access Level 2. The concepts/processes must then be applied explicitly and appropriately throughout the interpretations, the conclusions and the evaluation. To gain all 6 marks in this section, the candidates must have used their key concepts/processes accurately throughout the entire body of the work.

One error made by centres in relation to Geographical Understanding was the failure of their 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 at 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 candidates are required to explicitly identify and define their key concepts/processes. In many centres candidates were encouraged to highlight each key concept/process every time they used it within the work. Now the candidates, their teachers and the moderator 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 number of key concepts/processes, often six or more, and as many as 25 in some cases, and then fail to explicitly incorporate any of them within their Methodology or another part of their investigation. Just mentioning the key term is not sufficient, the terms must be used accurately within the appropriate strand of the investigation.

Methodology

This strand was tackled well by candidates with the majority gaining marks at Level 2 or above. The Specification requires candidates to use just one hypothesis or key 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 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 candidates had too much material to process, analyse and interpret.

Once candidates 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 candidates write the descriptions of their methods in much more detail than the justifications. If they can write the descriptions of the methods sufficiently clearly that another candidate could follow them to replicate the task then top Level 2 marks would be secure. Within their descriptions, candidates could include locations used, sample sizes, sampling techniques, durations of counts (eg for traffic/pedestrians) and timings relevant to the methods used. Some of the descriptions seen were too brief and vague for the marks awarded. Where data collection methods such as

questionnaires, environmental quality surveys and land use surveys are being used, the descriptions should identify the questions used, the environmental factors and scoring system employed and the land use categories involved in the survey. These can be written into the descriptions of the methods or a reference to this information can be provided by the candidate, e.g. 'a copy of the questionnaire follows', 'the EQS criteria are on page x', 'the land use classifications are on the map on page y'.

At times candidates had too many data collection methods, up to nine were seen, and in such instances candidates often described each method too briefly to access top Level 2 marks. It is far better that candidates have a method to address each key term and three well described and clearly justified methods can access all of the marks in this strand.

For this Specification, there is no requirement for candidates to devise one or more methods of data collection for themselves. It is the justification of the data collection methods used which makes up the key part of the Level 3 descriptor. 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, and then 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 must complete these 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 evaluative comments about their methods and results more effectively. Teachers must not provide pre-printed methodology tables for candidates to use when writing up this part of their investigation. If such tables are produced, then there may be concerns regarding possible malpractice.

Failure to include any primary data within the investigation limits 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 over-marked the work of their candidates in this strand.

To reach Level 3 candidates must first fulfil the requirements for Levels 1 and 2. At Level 1 the candidates have to produce a limited range of presentation techniques (aim for three different skills) which can be basic and not quite complete but they must be appropriate and carry a clear message about what the data shows. An additional two presentation skills, both complete and accurate, can earn the candidate marks to the top of Level 2. Some candidates only employed one or two basic techniques but repeated them several times over. Duplication of basic techniques gains no credit for the candidate. It was not uncommon to see incomplete and inaccurate work given undue credit. In some instances almost all of the presentation skills seen from some centres were incomplete. Graphs should always be complete with a title and labels on the axes; maps

should always have a title, scale (or scale reference) and a North arrow if marks at Levels 2 and 3 are to be considered.

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 and dispersion graphs.

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 candidate is to be awarded any marks. If there is no evidence of ICT the candidate 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 candidates gave descriptions of their results without offering reasons for their findings or making direct reference to the data they had collected. Centres often over-marked these descriptive accounts of the interpretations 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, ratios and averages 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.

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. Candidates can be moved into or out of a Level based on the quality of their written communication.

Evaluation

For Level 1 in this strand of the assessment criteria candidates 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, candidates 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 candidates 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 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 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 candidate to provide an appraisal of the effectiveness of their investigation and to suggest how improvements can be made.

As with Methodology, there were examples of teachers providing candidates with pre-printed tables to complete the work for this strand. This is not allowed and may constitute malpractice.

Task 2. 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 55% of centres tackled the Energy task.

This was the second year in which the supporting statements previously supplied were not included with the two task options. Teachers had to plan a 'route' for their candidates to follow to meet the requirements of the task, but sometimes this planning went too far and candidates were given too much support. Controlled Assessment Advisors are happy to work with centres when they are planning this task.

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 where material from websites was simply downloaded as text and images 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, 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 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 candidates 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 centres.

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. Candidates 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 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. Some centres 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 and these were integrated effectively and appropriately 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, there were ICT contributions to the final report and the skills of presentation were appropriate, so illustrations and figures were used to enhance the text and these were inserted at the most appropriate points within the report. At Level 3, the final reports were presented to a very high standard and were well organised, with figures being complete with titles and integrated effectively, e.g. ‘as shown on the map, figure 3, below’.

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. Two opposing views are required for candidates 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. Candidates should not use their own views in this section as it is in the Conclusions that such opinions are credited. Comments from fellow candidates or parents should also not be used. Candidates have four hours research time before starting this work and it is during the research phase that appropriate evidence regarding views held by stakeholders should be collected.

It was not unusual to see candidates using 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 candidates identified specific interest groups, stated the viewpoint or stance of each group, often supporting this information with quotes, and they then used their own words to develop the points being made.

Conclusions

Within this strand candidates have 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 references to sources or evidence presented within the body of the work.

Final Observations

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 by AQA.

In some centres it was evident that internal standardisation was not taking place or it was not effective and this can lead to significant adjustments to the centre’s marks.

Most centres are now familiar with the assessment criteria and the statements found within each Level are clearly being used to plan the investigations undertaken by the candidates. 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.

Where centres are experiencing difficulties, there is support available from Controlled Assessment Advisors and this support can be arranged by contacting the Subject Office at AQA. There are exemplar investigations with commentaries on the AQA website and other supporting material is also available from AQA.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)