



General Certificate of Education

Geography 6036

Specification B

GGB7 The Investigation

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - January series

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Introduction

The entry for this examination session was again small, so was not representative of the larger entry of the Summer Series.

There was a pleasing range of appropriate topics for investigation and, in this series, all samples were clearly linked to the specification.

On a very positive note, centres are again commended for the effort put into the supervision of the candidates. The quality of the work was generally of a high standard and there was very little evidence of under-prepared candidates who might score at the lower end of the mark range.

Centres are evidently familiar with the marking criteria and are preparing candidates to attain a good standard, according to the ability and application of the candidate. Some centres use a formulaic, group work approach, with fieldwork based on the same or similar topics, frequently to meet concerns of health and safety. This approach, occasionally, can limit the opportunity for individual choice and flair. On the other hand, many centres allow candidates to select their own individual investigation topics. Both approaches are acceptable and permitted high quality investigations.

The consistent, clear annotation of the investigations, with details of both level and criteria statements was very commendable and provided invaluable support for the moderation process. The clear and effective use of the 'tick sheet' to indicate how the centre had allocated marks was also of great assistance and centres are to be commended for this, though the number using these was reduced. The accuracy of application of the marking criteria is commended; no adjustments were made to centre marks. However, a small number of centres demonstrated a slightly more generous application of the mark scheme, particularly with regard to Skills and Knowledge and Critical Understanding. In the former, work without the use of relevant statistical tests was awarded high marks. In the latter, centres sometimes awarded high marks for description, rather than for the expected interpretation.

Centres are reminded to send a Centre Declaration Form, duly countersigned by the teacher and the Head of Centre, with the Centre mark Sheets.

The importance of submitting investigations in appropriate A4 formats, i.e. without the use of ring binders and individual plastic sheets cannot be over-emphasised. This was another improving feature of this examination session as no examples of this were seen. The investigation should be submitted in one folder only. Candidates are reminded that illustrative material must be included in the main body of the investigation and not in appendices, where opportunities for integrated analysis and interpretation are restricted. Similarly, evidence of raw data, such as all completed questionnaires, should be retained by the candidate rather than being included with the investigation. This was not a great issue in this series.

The great majority of candidates clearly target the recommended word limit of 4000 words. However, a very small number of candidates are not closely monitored by centres and are permitted to submit an investigation significantly longer. This was happily even less of an issue in this series.

Knowledge (K)

The great majority of candidates are now accessing Level 2 for this assessment criterion.

Reference is usually made consistently to the location, with relevant geographical characteristics provided, with most candidates being aware of the relevance of a location map. Relatively few candidates provide detailed location details of the sites on a large-scale map. The use of Google Earth images instead of a location map was noted in this series. The use of this image, as for the downloaded maps they replace, is critical so that suitable annotations are essential to show the relevance of the images. Detail of the underpinning geographical ideas was invariably provided, thus making use of theory relevant to the study and applying this information and knowledge to the location selected. There was far less evidence of pages of material uncritically copied from textbooks and similar sources, with the exception of some examples of irrelevant historical narrative. There was also greater consistency of use of appropriate geographical terminology, which was generally competent, reflecting the ability of the candidates.

Critical Understanding (CU)

The majority of candidates accessed at least Level 2 by demonstrating understanding of geographical knowledge at a higher level. The better candidates could demonstrate detailed explanation of this knowledge to access Level 3. There was a clear association with the level accessed for this assessment criterion and the use of geographical knowledge in knowledge (K) and the Quality of Language demonstrated. The majority of candidates were aware of the limitations of the sources of evidence, interpreted by many as limitations in data collection. Such evidence was rewarded here and in Skills (S). It was also clear that some candidates were less certain of the limitations or potential of the theories, concepts and principles relevant to the investigation.

The importance of attitudes, values and decision-making processes and human activity criteria is applied where relevant to the investigation. It is implicit in investigations based on human topics, but it may not always be applicable to those investigations based on physical topics. It was encouraging to see evidence of an increasing number of candidates undertaking such physical investigations being able to bring in the importance of human activity.

Knowledge & Critical Understanding (KU)

This criterion is defined as the application of knowledge and understanding in unfamiliar contexts. It is another assessment criterion that candidates are consistently accessing Level 2. The moderator noted, with approval, increasing evidence both of the use of appropriate statistical techniques and understanding of the application of significance to the results of the tests. It was pleasing to note a greater variety of statistical tests being employed this series, with Mann Whitney and Wilcoxon joining the more familiar Spearman and Chi². The importance of confidence levels is increasingly recognised in establishing the sample size in planning the study, as is the importance of this sample size in interpreting significance. Candidates repeating a standard outcome generated by a computer package must be able to interpret the result and know why the test was used.

Most candidates move beyond mere description of their results and offer more detailed synthesis, referring to the underpinning theories and concepts. Conclusions are developed from the data and the better candidates offer some comment on the limitations of these conclusions.

Evaluative skills are an important element of the assessment criteria in this specification. In this assessment criterion, an evaluation of the success of the investigation as a whole is required, thus moving beyond consideration of the limitations of data collection, which are also assessed under Skills. Candidates do find this more of a challenge than might be expected, but this applies to a smaller proportion at each examination session. A very small number of candidates failed to include a conclusion or an evaluation section, possibly those who struggled to submit work to centre deadlines.

Skills (S)

Candidates are demonstrating an improving use of skills. The range of appropriate skills and in addition, the level for collection, sampling, organisation and presentation is assessed. Most candidates demonstrate a range of skills appropriate to the enquiry, thus accessing at least Level 2. Additionally, most of the sources, including both primary and secondary, are used; again permitting access to Level 2, and in many cases, Level 3. High level collection and sampling skills were consistently demonstrated. In particular, the application of a rigorous sampling strategy was found more consistently, though this was by no means universal. Candidates are to be encouraged to provide details of how, for example, any transect lines were selected, rather than just concentrating on the sampling along the line. Centres are commended for the supervision and monitoring necessary to achieve this improvement. Candidates should describe, explain and justify the methods of data collection, including sampling, to ensure they can access Level 3 of this assessment criterion.

Skills of organisation and presentation again showed improvement. The increasing relevant application and understanding of statistical techniques, with the use of significance, has been mentioned above. On the other hand, there is a small number of candidates that plot a scatter graph, for example, but are unable to recognise that Spearman's Rank Correlation Co-efficient would be an appropriate skill to use.

Presentational skills can be broadly categorised into cartographic and graphical. Many candidates at both ends of the ability range seem to be unable to move beyond uncritically downloaded base and location maps, used without annotation and thus lacking relevance. This lack of critical awareness of the relevance and use of such maps is disappointing and is a major area of decline. The use of Google Earth as a resource is noted above. The highest order skills include examples such as bar/pie graphs located either on base maps or transect diagrams to enable comparisons to be readily made. The uncritical use of the wizard provided in the graphics package tends to be demonstrated by pages of bar and pie charts, or their variants. There was far less use of this approach this series. In addition to the variety of graphs used to present data, candidates are increasingly using the star chart found in the wizard. Although this is a valid alternative, candidates frequently are unable to understand what is shown by the data.

The use of statistical packages for drawing scatter graphs should be used with care as evidence was seen of inappropriate lines of best fit being drawn because of an over-reliance on the package. Alternatively, candidates do not comment on the variable trend lines drawn.

The evaluation of the appropriateness and limitations of all of the skills employed continues to be a good discriminator. Most candidates are able to provide evidence of an awareness of the limitations of the methods of data collection, but fewer are able to comment on their appropriateness. Candidates frequently offer a list of limitations of the methods of data collection rather than evaluate in detail. An understanding of the importance of the relevance of temporal and spatial scales in the selection of sites and collection of data is far more of a challenge. This tends to restrict access to Level 3 to the very best candidates.

Communication

Although not formally assessed, the clear and effective use of English and geographical terminology is reflected in the application of the assessment criteria. It is pleasing to record a continuing improvement in the use of language skills in investigations, with sophistication seen at the highest levels. The spell check aids those demonstrating word processing skills (which are not compulsory) and the great majority of candidates now apply this feature.

However, there were a number of errors caused by the uncritical use of this facility or plain carelessness, as set out below:

- suviner for souvenir
- sever for severe
- incites for insights
- strait for straight
- woked for worked
- anomile for anomaly
- hoses for houses.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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