

GCSE, AS/A level

# Geography Fieldwork Guide

In association with the Field Studies Council, the Geographical Association and the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)



# A meaningful and clearly structured approach to fieldwork

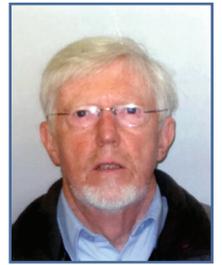
## Introduction

This Geography Fieldwork Guide is designed for use by teachers of GCSE and AS/A level Geography. It provides high quality support for teachers undertaking fieldwork as well as preparation for the independent investigation.

Fieldwork is at the heart of our Edexcel specifications in GCSE and AS/A level Geography. Throughout this Guide, as well as including the Department for Education requirements and support for your planning, we include recommendations from our Edexcel specifications to provide a meaningful and clearly structured approach to fieldwork.

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Dear Head teachers and Heads of Geography,

From September, students taking a GCSE or AS/A level geography course will study new specifications where fieldwork requirements have changed significantly.

- ✓ GCSE students must undertake fieldwork outside the school grounds in two contrasting environments.
- ✓ AS level students must undertake 2 days of fieldwork.
- ✓ A level students must undertake 4 days of fieldwork and complete an Independent Investigation.

DfE and Ofqual (in consultation with the geography community) are in no doubt that fieldwork is an essential experience for all students studying Geography. That is why they have required a greater profile and entitlement to fieldwork in the newly reformed geography qualifications from 2016, including the requirement for Head teachers to sign a formal declaration:

*'The fieldwork statement will be a true and accurate statement that each Learner taking the specification assessment has undertaken appropriate geographical fieldwork.'*

Ofsted (2011) found that fieldwork encouraged a higher than average take-up of geography GCSE, AS and A level courses and that where geography teaching was weak at KS3, students were denied crucial elements of a broad and balanced education for life. Fieldwork has a strong track record of motivating and providing students with the geographical and 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills they need to progress in the contemporary world.

Fieldwork can be challenging, informative, sometimes messy but frequently fun. Allowing students to explore issues and questions in a real-world context that frequently produces uncertain or 'grey' outcomes encourages them to question their own findings and nurtures analytical and critical thinking as well as building resilience.

Fieldwork can strengthen skills and reach learners that other approaches fail to reach. Please make sure your students get the best fieldwork experience your colleagues and resources can provide, whether it be local days out, formal teacher-led field-trips or working with a fieldwork provider.

Yours sincerely

Tony Thomas

*"Fieldwork is an essential aspect of geography, which ensures that students are given the opportunity to consolidate and extend their achievement by relating learning to real experiences of the world."*

Department for Education

# Developing skilled and successful geographers

We've worked in association with the Field Studies Council, the Geographical Association and the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) to create our GCSE and AS/A level Geography Fieldwork Guide. Here's their advice for all UK geography teachers as to the importance of geographical fieldwork and its impact in developing skilled and successful geographers.

“Fieldwork inspires; it is hands-on real-world learning, allowing students to make meaning of the landscapes and cities they live in. It is an integral part of geography ensuring we develop understanding of ours and others' lives and the communities we live in and offers opportunities for personal and academic development and collaboration. Fieldwork takes us to new places where we explore, develop and experience, improving our geographical skills.”

[www.field-studies-council.org](http://www.field-studies-council.org)



“Well-designed fieldwork is one of the most memorable experiences students have at school. It provides inspiration, develops practical, group work and leadership skills and increases independence. Fieldwork can also produce impacts which go beyond education, by nurturing care for the environment. The academic gains from fieldwork are just as powerful as the skills and personal development it brings.”

[www.geography.org.uk](http://www.geography.org.uk)



“Good geography fieldwork gives students a hands-on experience of different environments, helping them to ‘think like a geographer’. It provides opportunities to deepen their knowledge of processes and locations, connect with the real-world and collect, analyse and draw conclusions from their data. It provides memorable experiences which, regardless of the weather, can spark a lifelong curiosity in people, places and environments.”

[www.rgs.org](http://www.rgs.org)

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Advancing geography  
and geographical learning

# GCSE Geography Fieldwork

## Understanding the requirements

Fieldwork must occur outside the classroom and school grounds, on at least two occasions. Evidence must be sent to the Awarding Organisation in the form of a written statement from centres.

Department for Education requirements:

- ✓ Understanding of the kinds of question capable of being investigated through fieldwork and an understanding of the geographical enquiry processes appropriate to investigate these in various ways including maps, graphs and diagrams.
- ✓ Analysing and explaining data collected in the field using knowledge of relevant geographical case studies and theories.
- ✓ Drawing evidenced conclusions and summaries from fieldwork transcripts and data.
- ✓ Reflecting critically on fieldwork data, methods used, conclusions drawn and knowledge gained.

Source: Geography GCSE Subject content, April 2014 Reference: DFE-00345-2014 copyright DfE

## Edexcel GCSE (9-1) Geography approach

### Edexcel GCSE (9-1) Geography A and B

Our Edexcel specifications support the shift from GCSE controlled assessment towards assessment through examination only. There is a greater focus on the route to enquiry, in particular to prepare students for questions with unfamiliar fieldwork data. Both specifications have clear fieldwork and prescribed tasks/environments, which make it easier for centres to plan and manage their fieldwork, as well as forming a meaningful link to assessment:

- ✓ At least two days of fieldwork in two contrasting environments in order to explore physical and human processes and the interactions between them.
- ✓ Some teachers may choose to provide extended fieldwork and enquiry-related opportunities to support and develop other aspects of learning, including: consistently integrating quantitative and qualitative skills within geography lessons, as well as using fieldwork to further explore geographical processes and case studies/located examples.
- ✓ Extended fieldwork opportunities to give students greater depth of understanding of the enquiry process as well as more choice and flexibility in the exam.
- ✓ In the physical environment the fieldwork focus is on investigating river or coastal landscapes.
- ✓ In the human environment fieldwork is focused on urban or rural environments.

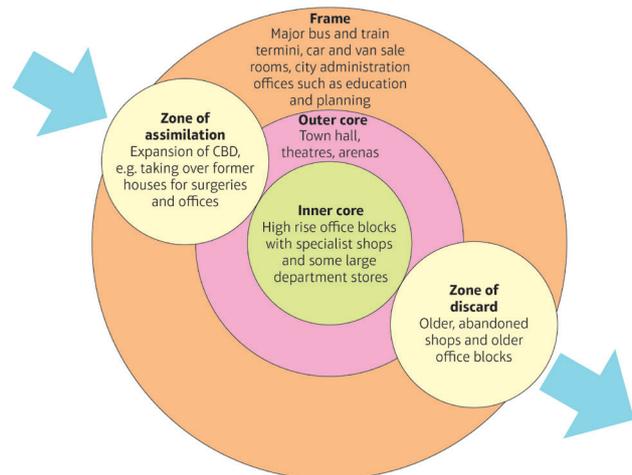


# GCSE Geography Fieldwork

## Planning

There are several questions to consider when organising a field trip. These will include not only a consideration of provider or teacher-led, residential or day fieldwork, but also possible fieldwork locations, equipment (including use of GIS), recording sheets and risk assessment considerations.

It is very likely that you will be able to continue using the same location as previously used for the controlled assessment. To broaden your focus, visiting the two contrasting environments at different times of the year, or in Year 10 (skills development) and Year 11 (skills consolidation), allows for greater development and progression of skills.



The core and frame of the central business district (CBD). This might provide an interesting framework for considering urban change.

	Year 10			Year 11		
	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Scenario 1	Trip 1				Trip 2	
Scenario 2			Trip 1			

**Scenario 1 – Split:** In this scenario, the trips can coincide with the teaching of the associated topic. The first day is planned at the beginning of Year 10 to provide a bonding experience for new GCSE classes (and daylight hours are still generous). The second day, near the end of Year 11, is a good opportunity to revise fieldwork and enquiry skills for the exam.

**Scenario 2 – Combined:** This scenario provides an opportunity for an extended fieldwork experience (even a 3–5 day residential field trip). Long days and good weather increase the likelihood of a very productive field trip, with time available for a brief write-up (useful for revision in Year 11).

In addition to this there should be thought given to relevant literature and secondary resources that might help you teach the route to geographical enquiry. Students should be encouraged to critique the theories and models they have learnt from their geography lessons and textbooks (for example the CBD ‘Core and Frame’ Model above).

# GCSE Geography Fieldwork

## Before the field trip

Pre-fieldwork should include a clear reference to the different stages of geographical enquiry. It is advantageous to plan the fieldwork collaboratively with students, and a range of immersive resources can be used to enable learners to ask geographical questions about the places they will be visiting.

e.g. Students might ask about this photo:

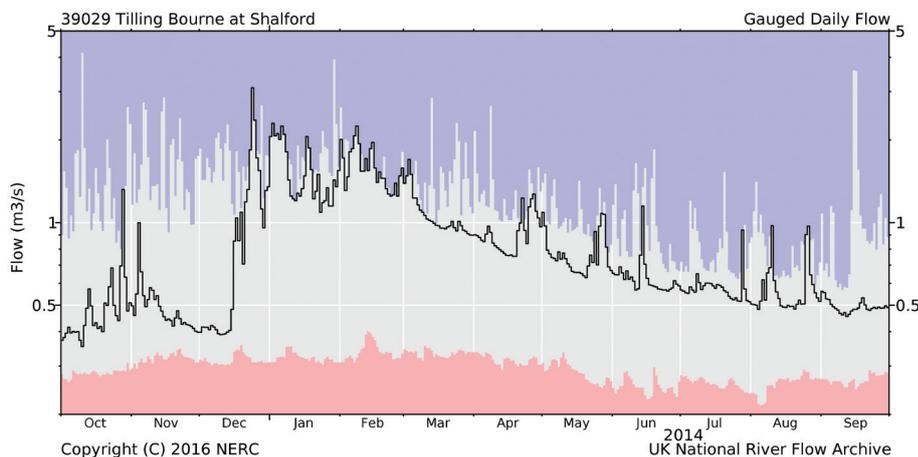
- ✓ What physical processes were involved in the formation of this estuary?
- ✓ How have the interaction of physical and human processes affected this place?
- ✓ What might change in the future (and why)?



Images can be used as a starting point to ask geographical questions. Why not combine with other resources such as maps, news articles, video clips, social media and even live video streams to help develop a sense of place before visiting the area?

## After the field trip

Students should receive guidance on how to follow up their fieldwork and take geographical meaning from the experience. It is a requirement that students make use of secondary data (which you may have used before the field trip). Again, a collaborative approach should be used to relate the experience to the six stages of the enquiry process. The unfamiliar data questions in sample assessments are a great way to apply what students have learnt to a related geographical enquiry and deepen their understanding.



Downloaded river hydrograph data (over one year) from the National Rivers Flow Archive. Edexcel GCSE (9-1) Geography specifies the use of additional secondary data.

# AS/A level Geography

## Fieldwork

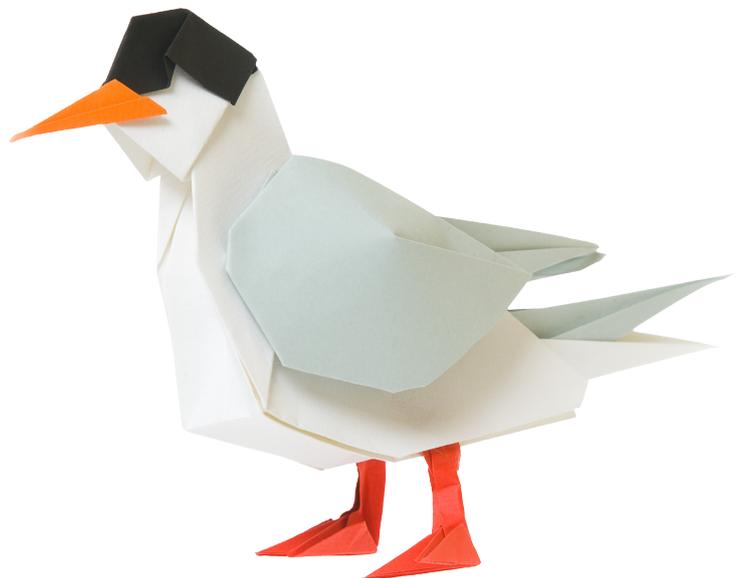
### Understanding the requirements

AS level students must undertake a minimum of 2 days of fieldwork, and A level students must undertake a minimum of 4 days of fieldwork (which can include the 2 days completed at AS level). Evidence must be sent to the Awarding Organisation in the form of a written statement from centres.

#### Department for Education requirements:

- ✓ Undertake fieldwork in relation to processes in both physical and human geography (some, but not all of this, may be within the context of people environment questions and issues).
- ✓ Identify appropriate research questions using their own knowledge and understanding.
- ✓ Undertake informed and critical questioning of data sources, analytical methodologies, data reporting and presentation, including the ability to identify sources of error in data.
- ✓ Understand how to observe and record phenomena in the field and be able to devise and justify practical approaches taken in the field, including frequency/timing of observation, sampling.
- ✓ Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how to select practical field methodologies (primary) appropriate to their investigation.
- ✓ Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of implementing chosen methodologies to collect data/information of good quality that is relevant to the topic of investigation.
- ✓ Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the techniques appropriate for analysing field data and information and for representing results, including GIS, and show ability to select suitable quantitative or qualitative approaches and to apply them.
- ✓ Apply existing knowledge and concepts to identify, order and understand field observations.
- ✓ Show the ability to present and write a coherent analysis of fieldwork findings and results in order to justify conclusions as well as to interpret meaning from the investigation, including the significance of any measurement or other errors.

Source: Geography GCE AS and A level subject content December 2014 Reference: DFE-00693-2014 © DfE



# AS level Geography Fieldwork

## Edexcel AS level Geography approach

We support progression from GCSE towards a deeper understanding of fieldwork at AS level. It is crucial that students have access to appropriate opportunities for meaningful research, as well as having engagement in the decision-making processes that surround good fieldwork and research (an important feature of geographical investigations at GCSE and AS/A level).

Our high quality free support (e.g. our forthcoming in-depth AS/A level Practical Fieldwork Guide) allows students to experience, develop and demonstrate the full range, variety and diversity of fieldwork skills required. Our Edexcel specification has prescribed fieldwork environments that make it easier for centres to plan and manage their fieldwork, as well as forming links to assessment.

- ✓ In the physical environment, fieldwork is focused on investigating glacial or coastal landscapes (processes, management aspects).
- ✓ In the human environment, fieldwork is focused on investigating either the regeneration or the diversity of places in either urban or rural locations.
- ✓ Students should be encouraged to take increased responsibility for fieldwork planning and design in order to understand the process of geographical enquiry more deeply.
- ✓ Extra fieldwork to support and develop other aspects of learning including general fieldwork, literature research and data processing skills, particularly to help prepare and up-skill for the Independent Investigation at A level.

## Planning

There are several questions to consider in terms of planning AS level fieldwork. One important area is how to progress from a “framed enquiry” approach to one of “independent enquiry”.

Framed enquiry	Independent enquiry
✓ Enquiry questions are explicit but developed by the teacher.	✓ Students decide enquiry questions, framed by teacher input.
✓ Decisions about fieldwork procedure are largely made by the teacher.	✓ Students largely make their own procedural decisions with the teacher acting as a mentor
✓ Literature research is collaborative and supported.	✓ Literature research is independent.

Centres may want to spread the two days across the year to allow for the development and progression of skills, as well as to make direct links to a corresponding topic while it is being taught in lessons. If co-teaching AS and A level this trip should be seen as a significant opportunity to develop the skills required for the Independent Investigation at A level.

# AS level Geography Fieldwork

## Before the field trip

- ✓ Lessons before the field trip should include a clear reference to the stages identified in the Department for Education requirements or the associated skills in our Edexcel AS level Geography specification (page 55), which constitute the geographical route to enquiry.
- ✓ How to develop a hypothesis or research question is essential, as is planning fieldwork collaboratively. This should lead to a meaningful discussion about different types of data, information and research.
- ✓ Students should think carefully about methodologies, especially the role of sampling as a tool to improve reliability of outcomes as well as the ethical dimensions of research.

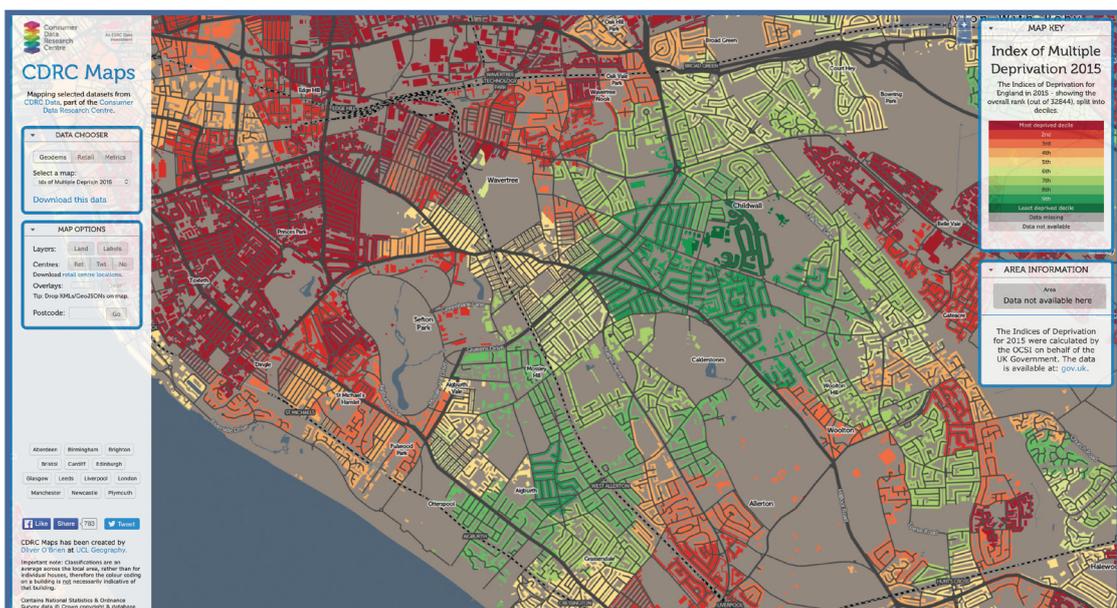


Twitter can be used to provide primary data to learn more about people's perception of a location.

Note: There are some considerable overlaps between what traditionally might be considered primary and secondary data, as well as qualitative and quantitative data.

## After the field trip

- ✓ Students will need to receive guidance after the field trip in order to gain the most from their fieldwork experience.
- ✓ Collaborative working is recommended so that individual groups or students contribute to each step in the geographical route to enquiry.
- ✓ A very useful revision exercise before assessment could be to share, revise and review peer work.



Index of multiple deprivation data from CDRC maps. This information can be invaluable in adding depth and rich meaning to other fieldwork data that has been collected by students.

# A level Geography

## Independent Investigation

Department for Education requirements:

The independent investigation may relate to human or physical geography or it may integrate them. The independent investigation must:

- ✓ be based on a question or issue defined and developed by the student individually to address aims, questions and/or hypotheses relating to any of the compulsory or optional content
- ✓ incorporate field data and/or evidence from field investigations, collected individually or in groups
- ✓ draw on the student's own research, including their own field data and, if relevant, secondary data sourced by the student
- ✓ require the student independently to contextualise, analyse and summarise findings and data
- ✓ involve the individual drawing of conclusions and their communication by means of extended writing and the presentation of relevant data

Source: Geography GCE AS and A level subject content December 2014 Reference: DFE-00693-2014 © DfE

## Edexcel A level Geography approach

- ✓ It is crucial that students have access to appropriate opportunities, throughout KS3, KS4 and KS5, for meaningful research, as well as being fully engaged in the decision-making processes that surround high quality fieldwork and research in order to achieve full independence at A level.
- ✓ Fieldwork planned at A level needs to be carefully considered in terms of developing progression from GCSE and AS level, not only in terms of skills, but also in a sufficient range of techniques used in a variety of geographical environments.
- ✓ At least four days of fieldwork (in total) are required as a minimum plus any extra fieldwork opportunities, in both a physical and human context. This might include some time that is supervised or un-supervised individual work. See examples below:

Model 1	Model 2
2 days of teacher-led fieldwork in total, which includes 1x human and 1x physical experience	3 days of teacher-led fieldwork in total, which includes 1x human and 1x physical experience
2 days where students work independently, which includes collecting their own data	At least 1 day where students work independently, which includes collecting their own data
Both models include the equivalent of 4 complete days of fieldwork. Teachers could keep a record of of this, e.g. student's data, information, photos, plans, to help with standardisation and moderation. etc	

It's useful to provide extra fieldwork opportunities, for example at the end of the summer term, or so students can undertake their own independent field trip during the holidays.

# A level Geography

## Planning

Departments should think about the possible opportunities of linking the 14 specialised concepts (see page 13) as well as mapping areas of the specification which have clear potential as good lines of enquiry for students.

There is a good deal of flexibility in terms of timing as to when fieldwork might take place. This will take into account availability of spaces at field centres, prior learning of students, possible overseas opportunities etc.

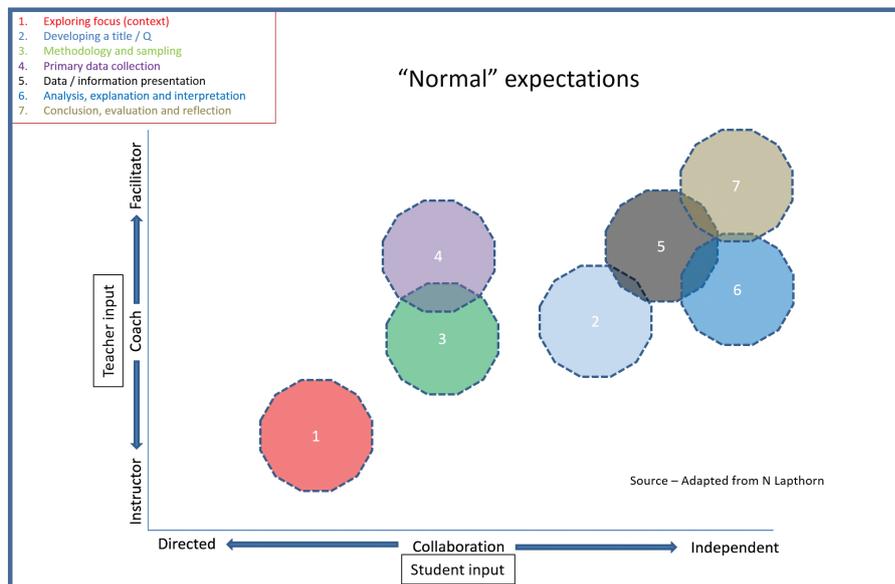
	Year 12 (AS and/or 1st year of A level)			Year 13 (2nd year of A level)		
	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Scenario 1	Trip 1			Trip 2	Ind 1	
Scenario 2			Trip 1	Ind 1		
Scenario 3			Trip 1	Ind 1		Ind 2

Ind = Independent Investigation write-up

**Scenario 1 – Co-teaching:** At the beginning of Year 12, AS and A level students are taught how to carry out fieldwork and the enquiry process as a whole. Those continuing A level independently plan their focus and methodology at the end of Year 12 or beginning of Year 13 just before the second field-trip where the teacher now acts as a facilitator. Students write up their coursework before the Christmas break.

**Scenario 2 – Summer write-up:** In this scenario, A level students undertake all 4 days of fieldwork after the AS level exams (or Year 12 mocks) and can make use of the summer break to write up their independent investigation. The beginning of Year 13 can be used to provide further generic support for writing up their coursework, and students finish writing up their coursework before Christmas.

**Scenario 3 – Extended write-up:** To provide increased support for students, the summer term of Year 12 could be used to spend more time in lessons preparing students before the independent investigation. The field trip is undertaken before the summer break and then students have this and the autumn term to produce their first drafts, and in spring students can receive further generic support for writing up their coursework.



A framework which allows teachers to visualise the relationship between levels of teacher input and levels of student input at various stages in the independent investigation.

# A level Geography

## Creating independent learners

Key to a successful independent investigation will be the student's ability to be imaginative and creative, whilst working independently throughout the route to geographical enquiry.

Teachers can offer more in-depth advice and guidance at the "focus" stage, but need to step back and act as a **facilitator** in later stages.

In order for students to design a methodology and learn how to use field techniques accurately, the teacher will want to offer generic **coaching** beforehand to equip them with the necessary field skills, perhaps during the AS field trips or at the start of an A level field-trip. Also to bear in mind is that students can work collaboratively during the primary data collection, both to manage health and safety considerations as well as to facilitate the practical nature of data collection.

### Checklist:

- ✓ Investigative, enquiry-led fieldwork is about finding out new things about people, places and environments.
- ✓ Students often find this difficult and might get concerned: "Will it work?" or "Will we get the right answer?", or be anxious that "It doesn't fit the model". For this reason they may end up asking simple or safe questions rather than the 'interesting' questions.
- ✓ Students should not be afraid to explore a range of different approaches and ideas as part of their fieldwork, such as controlled experiments, using GIS and virtual fieldwork. The resources on the next page provide an effective starting point for teachers to explore this further.
- ✓ A focus on the key concepts in geographical understanding allows students to link their independent investigations to the wider world and supports progression to further study. It does this by enabling students to apply their local findings to a broader 'systems approach' to geography. Students might link their enquiry to different spatial and temporal scales and develop an understanding of how these are interconnected.

4 Core Concepts	Place	Space	Scale	Environment	
14 Specialised AS/A level Concepts	Causality	Systems	Equilibrium	Feedback	Inequality
	Representation	Identity	Globalisation	Interdependence	Mitigation & Adaptation
	Sustainability	Risk	Resilience	Thresholds	

Key concepts in geographical understanding

# Resources and useful information

## Books and published resources

### **A-Z Advancing Geography Fieldwork**

Geographical Association. Holmes & Farbrother (2000)

### **Fieldwork Through Enquiry**

Geographical Association. Widdowson & Parkinson (2013)

### **Methods of Presenting Fieldwork Data**

Geographical Association. St John & Richardson (1997)

Geography Review Practical Fieldwork Articles can be accessed through an archive back to 1993.

[www.hoddereducation.co.uk](http://www.hoddereducation.co.uk)

## Online resources and information

The Field Studies Council has a wide range of free to access fieldwork ideas and documents for GCSE, AS and A level. [www.geography-fieldwork.org](http://www.geography-fieldwork.org)

### **Planning and Developing Fieldwork**

Geographical Association [www.geography.org.uk](http://www.geography.org.uk)

A series of thoughtful fieldwork-related journal articles.

### **The Case for Qualitative Fieldwork**

Royal Geographical Society [www.rgs.org](http://www.rgs.org)

### **Data Skills in Geography Project**

Royal Geographical Society [www.rgs.org](http://www.rgs.org)

### **Innovation in Fieldwork**

Royal Geographical Society [www.rgs.org](http://www.rgs.org)

The RGS GCE Subject Content overviews can also be used as a research-based introduction to several core topics.

Photo credits:

Page 6. Edexcel GCSE (9-1) Geography A Student Book. Pearson, ISBN 9781446927755

Page 7. Cuckmere Haven, Sussex. James Maxwell

Page 7. National Rivers Flow Archive

Page 10. Consumer Data Research Council

Page 12. Nick Lapthorn

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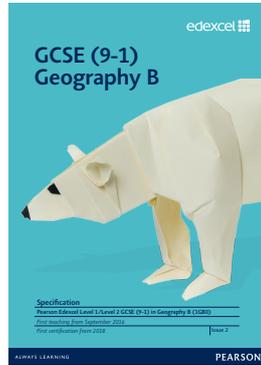
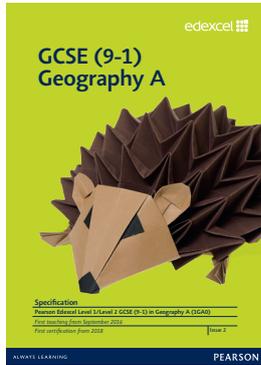
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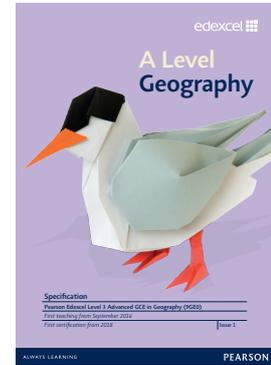
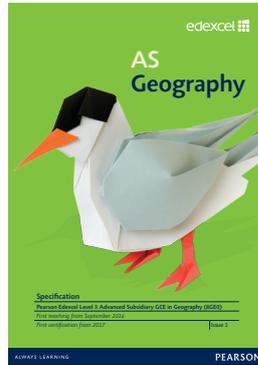
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