

Autumn 2018

Update from Awarding
Organisations

A Level Geography (2016)

Independent Investigation & Written Report

Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)



Introduction

For many students, coming up with their own idea for their investigation is the most challenging part of the new A-level Geography specification. While much of what was seen during Summer 2018 was encouraging with many students able to truly engage with the geographical enquiry process, this update has been prepared jointly by the four main Awarding Organisations to share some of the most valuable lessons learnt.

This update also serves to reinforce some of the key messages concerning the teacher's role in supporting students throughout their NEA journey in line with regulatory guidelines published by the Department for Education and Ofqual. These guidelines are common to all Awarding Organisations but individual moderator reports published by each organisation will also provide guidance on student performance in the NEA component.

Securing an appropriate title

Students must think very carefully about their proposed titles and teachers should encourage students to develop a statement, question or hypothesis that can be tested and is *clearly linked to the specification*. Students should be encouraged to constantly think ahead to the latter stages of their investigation. What data do they need and why? Will the data collected lend itself to meaningful analysis?

They should plan how, when and where to collect data that is relevant to their aim/question or hypothesis. Where relevant, breaking their main title down into sub-enquiry questions or hypotheses may help them plan their route through the investigation more effectively.

Many of the less successful investigations seen displayed some or all of the following characteristics:

- Titles that were too broad or unmanageable in terms of the geographical scale and/or the time available e.g. measuring multiple aspects of deprivation across a whole city. Thorough review of sampling techniques at the planning stage of the investigation could assist candidates to produce a precise focus leading to more meaningful data collection.
- Titles that explored issues where the student already knew the answer e.g. 'Does the quality of the environment vary between areas X and Y?' or 'The size of beach material varies with distance from the low-water mark on Beach A'. If students develop titles that are truisms, there is the risk that the investigation becomes very descriptive and uninspiring for the student. They offer only limited scope for meaningful data collection and evaluation.
- Titles that attempt to prove the impossible e.g. how successful a recent renovation project has been. Without a precise focus and clear parameters to measure 'success', studies such as this will provide few opportunities for drawing valid conclusions.

Securing independent titles

Each Awarding Organisation's specification details the precise requirements for independence but there are core requirements that are relevant to all. These must be implemented by centres and fieldwork providers. During the planning phase, students can participate in discussions surrounding possible focus areas within the specification and possible fieldwork methodologies that could be used.

Following the planning stage, the student must finalise the draft title of their investigation on his/her own, and must complete a detailed proposal form prior to commencing the data collection phase of the investigation. Teachers should be providing general guidance only to students during this initial planning phase and the final choice of aim or title **must** be the student's. Centres are permitted to provide broad parameters for the students e.g. a theme from the specification or a specific location for fieldwork, but must also recognise that inevitably, if students all visit the same environment(s) for fieldwork, there is a possibility of narrowing of titles. This is acceptable as long as students have made decisions about their planned investigation themes and titles independently.

The most outstanding studies seen in 2018 were often from students who were pursuing themes that had genuinely ignited their interest. Students' natural curiosity about a topic of their choosing should promote far greater engagement with the enquiry process.

Completing the student proposal form

It is critical that teachers discuss the marking criteria with students at an early stage in their planning so that students are aware of the characteristics of the top levels and propose an investigation that has the scope to access all parts of the mark scheme.

The Independent Investigation Proposal Form must be submitted with each sample investigation sent for moderation. It must be completed *in detail*. Links to the specification must be made explicit and students should detail their proposed hypotheses/questions and sub-hypotheses/questions as well as their methodology. Unfortunately, it was clear that the proposal form had not always been given the necessary priority by all centres and that students were not being given adequate opportunity to reflect on and refine their original ideas before embarking on fieldwork. Students must be given an appropriate amount of time to discuss their proposal with a teacher and re-work their ideas when necessary. The Independent Investigation Proposal Form must capture the discussion between student and teacher, ensuring at the outset that their investigation is methodologically and geographically secure.

The exemplar Independent Investigation Proposal Forms on each Awarding Organisation's website give advice on levels of teacher guidance permitted around students' titles. When discussing each student proposal, teacher input must be kept to that of general guidance only. Teachers could consider questions such as:

- Is the spatial scale of your proposed investigation appropriate and manageable given the time and resources you have?
- Is your title in the form of a question that will lead to a judgement being made?
- Are your sub-questions/hypotheses logically linked to your title and do they provide a logical structure for you to follow?
- Is the number of sub-questions/hypotheses appropriate i.e. will they lead to sufficient depth and manageable breadth?
- Have you planned for data collection that will allow you to answer each of your sub-questions/hypotheses and make an overall judgement?
- What broader geographical context can you investigate and link to your study?

Each proposal form must be approved and signed by the teacher **before** the student embarks on data collection.

Collaboration

Data can be collected by students in groups if appropriate to their investigations. In addition to this, students are permitted to work together to collect data to overcome health and safety challenges. During the write-up phase, students must work independently and should be able to draw on a range of data presentation and analysis techniques introduced during their geography course. As a result, even where overall titles are similar, candidates will have plenty of opportunity to display individuality in their approach.

Data collection

The investigation **must** be grounded in primary data collected in the field. The field data and evidence used in the investigation must draw on the student's own research and, if relevant, secondary data sourced by the student. Classroom based desk-studies that solely process existing secondary data are **not** permitted. Centres are reminded that in future years it is paramount that the student's own field data and evidence is used as a basis for their investigation.

If students are working in a group to collect their primary data they should still be independently making decisions around their own data collection techniques, sampling strategies and recording data. Students should not use data collection sheets provided by teachers or fieldwork providers during previous fieldwork activities. Students should be able to independently identify and justify which elements of the group data are relevant to their own investigation.

Supporting students during the investigation

During the planning and the write up phase, teacher input must be kept to that of general guidance only. Any guidance documentation should not relate specifically to an individual student's investigation. Teachers should not provide scaffolding for the investigation itself and corresponding sections within it (including personal ticklists) that go beyond what is detailed in the marking criteria. Providing templates of any kind for the purpose of the investigation constitutes malpractice. Teachers **must not** mark drafts during the write up phase and return them to the student for improvement.

Word length

There were considerable variations in the word counts in students' work and there were a number of candidates who exceeded this considerably. It is important that student's work is comparable and that they are aware that an advantage will not be gained by ignoring recommendations on word length set by the Awarding Organisations.

Centres should advise students that it is in their own interest, in terms of the assessment criteria and the time available to them, to produce investigations that are concise and focussed throughout. Often, investigations exceeding the word guidance resulted from titles that were far too broad in scope. Although the students are not in Higher Education, it is worth noting that Universities set a limit of 10% over / under the word length set.

Students should be made aware that more does not equal better; in many cases overly long investigations lost focus on the question at hand (such as overly long literature reviews). Teachers must take this into account when applying the assessment criteria; credit cannot be given for information provided which doesn't link to the title/hypothesis posed by the student (see 'Securing an appropriate title').

Additional guidance

This update amplifies the feedback published in our moderator and examiner reports for Summer 2018. For additional guidance, please refer to the Independent Investigation FAQ document and the range of exemplar Individual Investigation Proposal Forms provided. All are published on the website of each Awarding Organisation and are accessible by clicking on the links below:

Awarding Organisation	
AQA	A Level geography independent investigation guide to developing titles and completing the proposal form

	A level Geography Independent Investigation FAQ
Eduqas	A Level geography independent investigation guide to developing titles and completing the proposal form
	A level Geography Independent Investigation FAQ
Pearson/Edexcel	A Level geography independent investigation guide to developing titles and completing the proposal form
	A level Geography Independent Investigation FAQ
OCR	A Level geography independent investigation guide to developing titles and completing the proposal form
	A level Geography Independent Investigation FAQ
WJEC	A Level geography independent investigation guide to developing titles and completing the proposal form
	A level Geography Independent Investigation FAQ