



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCE in

A level Geography (9GEO/04)

Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications are awarded by Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at www.edexcel.com or www.btec.co.uk. Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at www.edexcel.com/contactus.

Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at: www.pearson.com/uk

June 2025

Publications Code 9GE0_04_2506_ER

All the material in this publication is copyright

© Pearson Education Ltd 2018

9GE04

The 2025 series was the first cohort who had carried out GCSE fieldwork and so were in the same position as the 2019 cohort. This has meant that the 2025 cohort showed a pleasing range of both physical and human fieldwork data collection techniques that blended the traditional (Bi-polar assessments) with more innovative techniques such as using the historic photo function in 'Street View' on Google Maps as well as the increased harvesting of data from social media that were used in the disrupted 'Covid' years.

As with 2024 there was a good balance between physical and human titles with again a pleasing number of investigations being carried out not just at the coast but also in relict glacial landscapes.

Titles

The Principal moderator is pleased to report that many of the titles now allow candidates to fully examine their subject by having titles such as 'To what extent are coastal management schemes successful' as opposed to 'What are the coastal management schemes ...'. Furthermore, these titles are now often accompanied by candidates explaining the criteria on how they are going to assess 'success' or 'effectiveness'. Good practice was shown by some candidates by using spectrums to show the extent (from none to complete) not only for their titles but also for their individual key questions.

This approach is strongly recommended as it allows the candidates to analyse, synthesise and draw conclusions from their fieldwork data that are far more sophisticated than those titles which have more simplistic titles that set out to examine say if one area is of higher quality than another or 'How does...'

There was less evidence of projects that were mainly based on secondary data this year but unfortunately those that do rely solely on secondary data and contain no fieldwork are self-penalising as they have not met the stipulation that the NEA must;

- incorporate field data and/or evidence from field investigations, collected individually or in groups

There are, unfortunately some issues with how the Independent Investigation form is being used by some centres. This is a key part of the NEA process and should be viewed as a working document. The principal Moderator would again like to emphasise that it is within guidelines for the centre to **ask** their candidates about what sampling methods might be appropriate or **how** the survey might be designed but not **suggest** which methods may be appropriate. This should be recorded on the planning sheet so the moderator can be assured that guidance provided has been within guidelines. Unfortunately there was some evidence that either no advice was given or this was 'retro-fitted' after the fieldwork data collection had been carried and some forms were signed at the same time of the submission of the coursework.

The specification clearly states that teachers **must**

- confirm that the provisional title has the potential to meet the assessment criteria and offer general guidance on any necessary amendments.
- review each candidate's Geography Independent Investigation Form. Within this review teachers should ensure that the proposed investigation can suitably access the specification requirements and give general guidance on the methodology and analytical tools that the candidate plans to use.

It is inevitable that there will be changes from an initial proposal to the finished investigation and centres and candidates should not be concerned if there are such changes. This is very much part of the enquiry process.

As with the advice offered in 2024, candidates would also benefit from having Key Questions that were formulated in a more analytical and less descriptive way. For example 'How does the beach profile change along the beach' and 'How does sediment size change' are descriptive questions less likely to lead to an analytical investigation. Instead they should be 'To what extent is the beach profile steeper at site X as opposed to site Y, or 'To what extent is the sediment size smaller at site X as opposed to site Y. This allows the use of statistics, particularly the confidence limits of statistical tests to answer this question.

There continues to be a wide variety of both physical and human coursework titles submitted this year. The success of regeneration schemes in urban areas was again the most popular urban title but it was pleasing to see some candidates attempting projects investigating the extent to which an urban rural continuum existed as well as the success of management techniques in relict glacial areas.

There was, unfortunately, a continued increase in the number of titles that were very similar to each other within a centre. This sometimes resulted in whole centres having effectively the same title and using the same data (and in some cases the same photograph). Third party providers can be very useful in providing equipment and guidance in using a variety of fieldwork equipment but centres and candidates are encouraged to develop their own titles/key questions as well as fieldwork data collection techniques. This allows them to ensure that their data collection techniques are relevant and also aids their analysis, synthesis and the drawing of their own conclusions to their individual titles.

Overall, the titles were at a manageable scale and the Principal moderator was pleased to see that there are fewer titles which are impossible to complete such as the impact of globalisation on an identified area. Yet there was still evidence of unsuitable titles such as investigations into the North/South gap as well as soil studies which are only tangential to the specification. Whilst these are of obvious interest for the candidates and at a university level may be successful dissertations they are unsuitable for a 4-5000 word Independent Investigation. Centres are reminded that they can give advice on the Independent Investigation form that such titles are unlikely to meet all of the mark scheme criteria and

suggest the candidate rethinks their title and key questions to a more manageable project. If in doubt over the amount of support that is allowed, centres are encouraged to use the CAS service offered by Pearson, the online and face to face training sessions and the exemplar materials provided the Pearson web site.

Purpose of the investigation

The best candidates continued to demonstrate accurate and relevant geographical knowledge and understanding of location, geographical theory throughout the investigations rather than just in the first section usually titled 'Introduction'. Models and theories were to the fore in many of the very best investigations and it was pleasing to see that many centres had explored more contemporary definitions of sustainable or vibrant communities and not only continued to use the Egan wheel as a tool for assessing the success of regeneration. Unfortunately despite comments made in previous reports some centres are still using very dated and usually irrelevant models such as the urban land use models developed by Burgess and Hoyt. There are now so many useful theories/concepts on urban areas it seems odd to use a model developed for Chicago nearly 100 years ago.

Many investigations continue to show good practice by allowing the moderators to develop a good sense of place using annotated maps, photographs and background information on the area under investigation. Once again, however, in some cases the location maps that were included had no scale which is essential for candidates to demonstrate that their NEA was carried out **at a manageable scale**.

As with last year, the Principal moderator is pleased that many candidates are now demonstrating accurate and relevant comparative contexts in this section of the NEA but would like to stress that these are not just to be used in the 'Introduction' but should be returned to at the end of the investigation in the conclusion. Here candidates are encouraged to see how similar/different their conclusions are to other similar situations. They should not be overlong and are definitely not a second study.

Most investigations now have a reference list at the end of the project or have footnotes. Centres are encouraged to read the most recent advice from Pearson on the use of AI in these investigations.

Field Methodologies and Data Collection

As stated at the beginning of this report, the 2025 cohort was the first cohort since 2019 that had carried out fieldwork for their GCSE study and as a result there was not only a greater confidence in using traditional methods such as bi-polars but also techniques used in the covid years such as the use of Google Street view, webcams and online surveys.

One unfortunate aspect of this was the use of pedestrian and traffic counts. In some cases these methods are useful and relevant to the candidates study but in other cases these were carried out as they appeared to be methods that the candidates were comfortable with. A key requirement of the Field Methodologies and Data Collection section is that;

Chooses **appropriate** methods to collect a range of data and information **relevant** to the geographical topic. (*My italics*)

Centres are therefore encouraged that during their compulsory four days of fieldwork a variety of appropriate methods are used. In particular, candidates should be encouraged to personalise their bi-polar survey so that they only contain criteria which are relevant to their own particular study.

It was pleasing to see that in some studies there was greater use of maps to show how, where and why data collection points were located. Unfortunately, as with 2024, sampling frameworks still seem to be an issue for some candidates. There is still little justification in relation to the key question or investigation title why one sampling technique was used as opposed to another. Instead generic advantages/disadvantages are often used. Such an approach makes it difficult to access the very highest marks in this section. Although there was more evidence of sample size being calculated for questionnaires using tools such as survey monkey, unfortunately the sample sizes were often very small and in some cases were less than 5 respondents. Centres are encouraged to advise candidates that whilst questionnaires can be a very useful tool they must understand that the analysis and synthesis of such small data sets is unlikely to lead to convincing conclusions.

The best candidates still used tables to summarise data collection methods with how/when/sampling/ethical consideration/problems/limitations – which were printed landscape. The better ones also had a clear link to the sub questions and so why the data was being collected.

There is still evidence of group data being collected with individual candidates then using some of the data collected. This occasionally led to some investigations only having a tangential link between their title and the group data that was collected. These investigations then found it challenging to have meaningful conclusions as often the group data collected had little relevance to their individual title. Centres should ensure that where group data is collected all of the candidates use this data meaningfully.

There was also further evidence of EPQ style investigations that relied almost totally on secondary data and had only minimal primary data collection.

It was however pleasing to report that most candidates have come to grips with what constitutes the ethical dimensions of field research methods. There were far fewer projects where the only considerations were a vague risk assessment (which in any case is not required for the investigation).

Data representation, analysis and interpretation

Candidates are continuing to use a pleasing range of both cartographical and graphical presentational techniques. There was evidence that geolocating packages such as 'Survey123' and ArcGIS are increasingly being used to present their data geographically. Weaker candidates, however, seem still beholden to only a few of the suggested graphs in excel and are still relying on a small variety of graphs for all their data with no cartographical methods

used at all. Centres and candidates are encouraged to explore using such data representation techniques and then geolocating them on a map to highlight spatial variations.

The use of statistics to aid the analysis of the data collected continues to be mixed and the Spearman's Rank test in particular was not well understood. There was continued evidence of errors such as using only 5 pairs of data as well as the incorrect calculation of the result. In some cases there was no reference to the level of confidence of results or an indication of how this was determined. Others also failed to link their statistical findings to their enquiry questions.

There is still a lack of coding used to analyse questionnaires. Although this is a high level skill it allows far better use of the data collected than a more traditional use of pie/bar charts for the individual questions.

As suggested in last year's report centres are encouraged to recommend the RGS 'A Student Guide to the A Level Independent Investigation (Non-examined Assessment—NEA)' to their students with help on choosing the appropriate statistical technique.

There was, however, one element that was observed in some of the work seen that had an impact on the marks awarded - the lack of synthesis of the results. In some cases, there was competent analysis of the work but it was presented in a very linear way and lacked cross referencing with other results. This meant that such projects found it difficult to fully synthesise the results that they had gained.

This was particularly the case where group data had been used. Candidates analysed each element of the data competently but due to either the irrelevance of the data collected or the unsuitability of the key questions/titles struggled to either link the data sets or link the data collected to their titles.

Centres are encouraged to suggest to their candidates that the best projects not only have a linear approach to the analysis but draw across the primary and secondary data to synthesise their results. Candidates should be encouraged to use more diagrams (mind-maps, spider etc) to try and show how their data links together to answer (or contradicts) their working hypotheses/key questions.

This was a section where, unfortunately, there was evidence of AI being used. There are clear details on how and how not to use AI in the NEA on the Pearson website but in a few cases, AI had clearly been used to analyse the data that the candidate had collected. This is malpractice and centres are reminded to impress upon their candidates the need to use AI appropriately.

Conclusions and Critical Evaluation

Despite previous reports stressing the need for candidates to fully appreciate the number of marks (24) on offer, there is still evidence that this section is often rushed and ill-understood by a sizeable minority of candidates. Centres and candidates are advised to reflect that for

convincing conclusions to be drawn, there must first of all be an evaluation of the results obtained from their field work, in particular the weighing up of the strengths and weaknesses of their results before coming to a conclusion. In many cases there was simply an affirmation of the results that the candidate had collected with little thought as to the extent to which say a perception of an area could really be based on the opinion of a handful of respondents to a questionnaire or the success of sea defences on one day's data collection.

Centres and candidates are encouraged to review the evidence for each Key Question in this section, evaluating which piece of evidence is stronger than the other and so allowing them to come to a convincing conclusion. Statistical tests, particularly an appreciation of the confidence limits of the particular test carried out will be useful to aid this process.

The best candidates often used some type of graphical representation of a spectrum to show the extent to which they had proved (or disproved) their key question/hypothesis.

The Principal moderator is concerned, however, that where a comparative context had been referred to in the purpose section, there was, generally, limited reference made to this in the conclusion. This is a key part of the investigation as it sets the conclusions drawn by the candidate to other real world examples and allows the candidate to assess the uniqueness or otherwise of their study.

The Principal examiner was pleased, however, that there is much evidence of good evaluations of the data collected and in particular the impact of the reliability of the data collection programme on the accuracy of the results and so the validity of the conclusions drawn. Centres are to be congratulated in ensuring that this crucial part of the investigation is now being given the weight it deserves in this final section.

Yet the best candidates displayed a balanced and concise, well-developed arguments which were fully supported by the drawing together of a selection of relevant evidence.

Summary

From the evidence of the 2025 cohort the Principal Moderator would advise centres that the best projects were

On a manageable scale

Utilised an appropriate framework

Choose appropriate methods collecting a range of data

Utilised a valid sampling framework that considered both temporal and spatial sampling

Considered ethical dimensions

Ensured that if group work was used they adapted this to their own investigation

Ensured that there were clear and technically accurate presentation techniques as well as the correct statistical analysis of the data

Synthesised their data

Developed rational evidenced based conclusions

Evaluated how the limitations of their data collection programme influenced the accuracy of their results and so the validity of their conclusions