

Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in Geography A (5GA04)

Unit 4: Investigating Geography

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Summary comments

The 2015 series has witnessed the fifth cycle of moderation for controlled assessments (CA) in GCSE Geography. For 2015, the stricter word limit rules have been modified slightly; words included in tables, graphs, quotations and references do not need to be included in the word total although tables must not be used for extended writing as a method of exceeding the word limit – p 40 of the Specification (Issue 5). Centres are advised to use the amended record sheet that allows candidates to select and sign whether they have/ have not gone over the word limit – p 80-83 of the Specification (Issue 5). The current specification can be found on the website using this link:

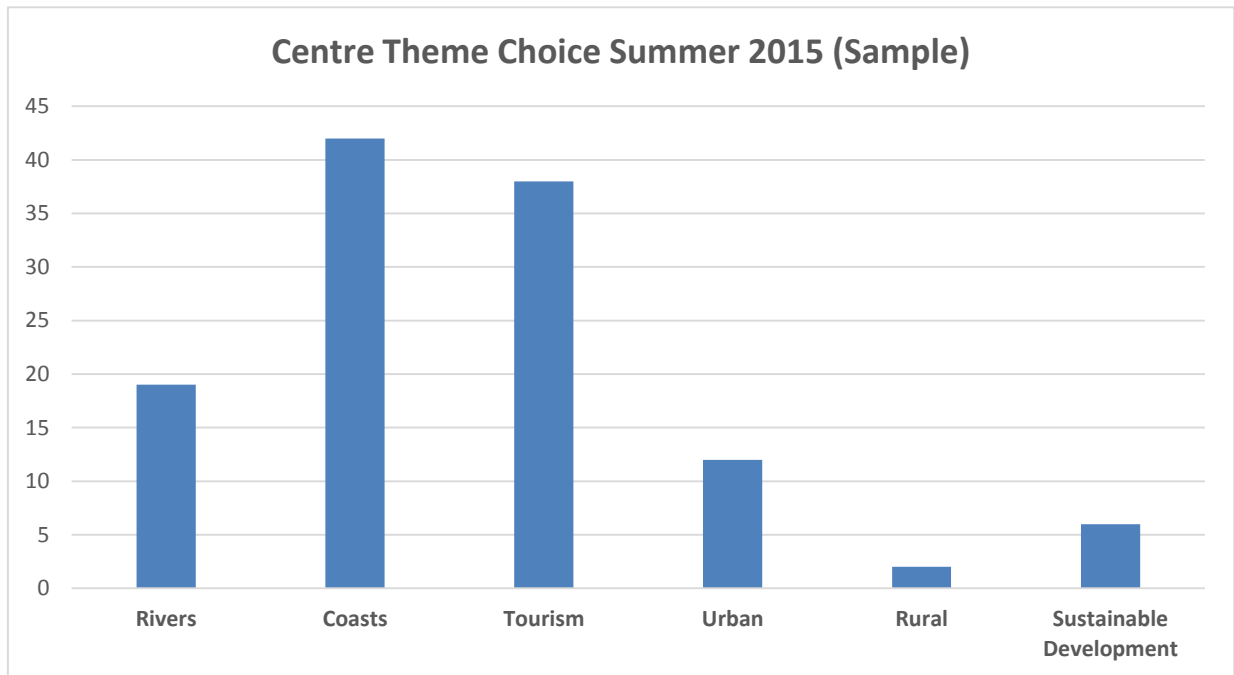
<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-gcses/geography-a-2009.coursematerials.html#filterQuery=category:Pearson-UK:Category%2FSpecification-and-sample-assessments>

It is pleasing to report that for the majority, the newly revised mark scheme (2014) did not present too many challenges. But again, Moderators reported that whilst some Centres attempted to encourage candidates to produce more succinct investigations, many, if not most, higher ability candidates did in fact exceed the word limit. This was largely because their introductions contained poorly connected and often unnecessary theory or background information. Centres are reminded that candidates are not required to include multiple pages of theory-based work, and should in fact encourage candidates to submit a purpose of investigation that is in the region of 300 words in length. On reflection, teachers have only partially adapted to the new mark scheme, as the two sections which were sometimes over-marked were data presentation (lack of complex techniques) and evaluation (still of the “wish I had tried harder” variety), even in 2015.

In this the fifth year, a key issue that remains is the appropriate contextualisation of the task so that the controlled assessment is both manageable and still closely linked to the main focus of the task set. Many of the Moderators for 2015 felt the majority of Centres appear to be still replicating exactly the same fieldwork that they have done for many years and failing to adapt to a different task, despite being given previous advice to modify their approach. The “how and why” components of tasks were rarely considered. This resulted in quite superficial references back to the overall task set in the overall conclusion or as reported, no overall conclusion back to the task at all.

The 2015 entry witnessed more of a rebalancing between physical and human tasks compared to the 2014 series (see Figure 1). Overall however, the human tasks seem less popular. This may be down to the fact that the human titles seem less “obvious” or it may be due to staffing choice, wanting to “do the river”. There is now much evidence that a majority of Centres are reluctant to change their choice (and sometimes approach) to task delivery. Whilst this is perfectly acceptable within the Regulatory framework, from an educational perspective there may be numerous benefits to consider changing tasks more often, not least to refresh the fieldwork.

Figure 1



Administration

Administration was similar to 2014 and a good proportion of work arrived on time (15th May 2015 deadline) and carrying the correct documentation. These Centres are thanked for their assistance in assuring that the moderation process was smooth and effective. Centres are however reminded that:

1. Some Centres used the incorrect candidate record sheet (legacy mark scheme from 2013) which resulted in the work needing to be returned to be remarked. It is important that the correct mark scheme is applied to the marking of work to ensure that candidate results are not negatively affected.
2. Moderators still found a number of errors in arithmetic in some work. It is essential that work is correctly added-up and those marks are accurately transferred to the OPTEMs / electronic sheets. If moderators find that work is not correct they will have to contact the Centre and request an adjustment. This creates an additional burden for all those involved. Please note that the OPTEMs should only be used to record the raw candidate marks (out of 50), not a percentage or any other conversion.
3. The top of the OPTEMs should be returned to Edexcel / Pearson, whilst the bottom yellow carbon sheet should be submitted to the Moderator with the sample, and the pink carbon sheet retained by the Centre.

4. Candidates should firmly attach their work together (no plastic wallets or A4 folders/wallets please) and complete the correct cover sheet indicating: specification, candidate and Centre names and numbers, date of exam cycle and task title. On some occasions the title-space was left blank so Moderators were unsure as to what the focus of the work might have been.
5. Both the teacher and candidate must sign the coversheet – always. This is a requirement of submission and work cannot be moderated without correct authentication.
6. Highest and lowest work must be included, even if it doesn't form part of the original (*) sample. If there are multiple pieces of work with the same highest / lowest marks then please just send one example at that mark.

Quality of Marking

For 2015, Moderators commented that marking was generally fair, reliable and accurate, very much maintaining the standards set by last year's qualification, despite there being changes to the mark scheme and word limit.

Once again some candidates, especially in the lower range of marks, seemed to be marked somewhat harshly. Equally there was evidence of some Centres being too optimistic for candidates around the A and A* grades (37-45 range especially). It was pleasing to see, and very helpful, that most Centres provided detailed annotations on both the record sheet as well as the candidate work, which explained the reasons for the marks awarded. Where this did not occur, Moderators found it more difficult to understand the reasons for the awarding of the marks given by teachers. In some cases for Centres where a number of teachers had marked candidates work, Moderators reported that there were significant variations in the accuracy of the allocation of marks; it is important that these Centres ensure internal standardisation takes place.

Criteria A – Purpose of Investigation

The key change to this criterion was the inclusion of the phrase 'contextualisation' of the task in the top band. Where candidates had achieved the highest marks there was evidence of a clear link to a model or geographical theory like Bradshaw and Butler. Alongside the theories, many candidates provided justification for the locational setting of their investigation using a series of GIS maps at different scales. It was also pleasing to see that some candidates had produced clear personal expectations for their hypotheses, with clear links to the underlining theory or model relevant to their investigation.

Whilst there was some exemplary work that met the marks in the top band, this higher standard of work remains inconsistent. In particular, where candidates' purpose lacked focus on the location, this was the result of GIS and OS maps produced at limited scales. Candidates should produce a clear set of location maps at a local, national and global scale, delivered with a suitable title, scale or direction symbol. Centres must ensure that candidates include a clear focus on the place under investigation. This can be achieved, for example, by providing an O.S.

extract with the sites marked precisely on the course of a river where the data was actually collected, or a street map of an urban area with the locations of traffic surveys pinpointed, or where questionnaires were conducted. The example below demonstrates this:

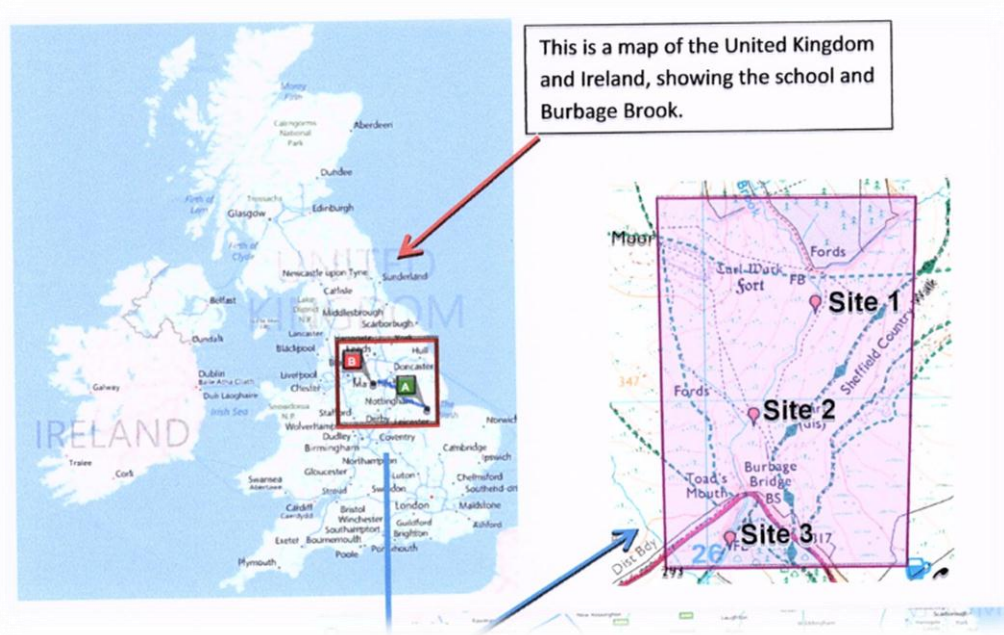
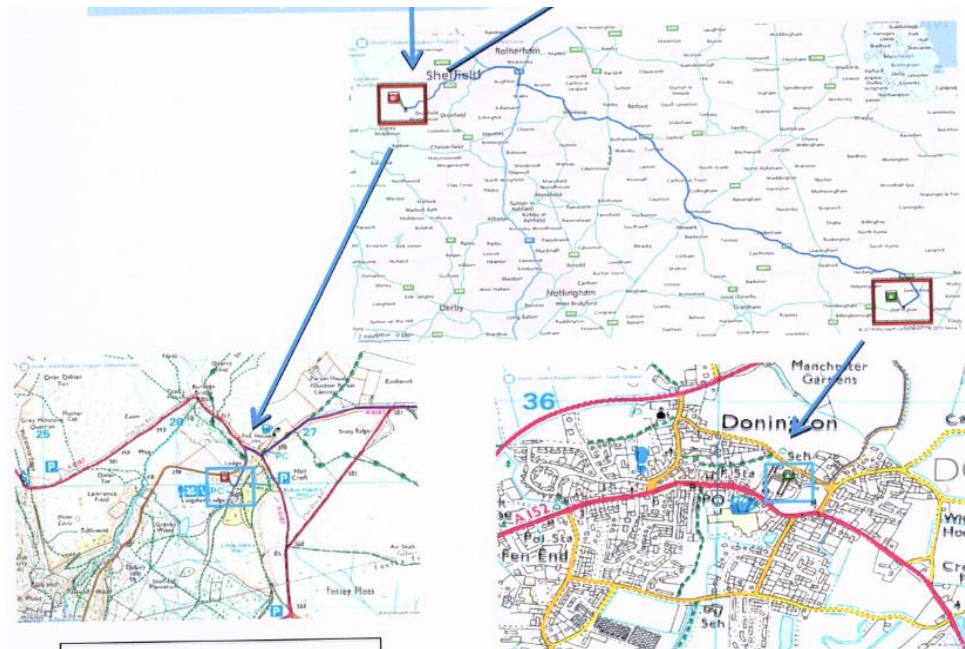


Figure 2



Following on from last year, there is still a need for candidates to evaluate their mini-hypotheses, either in terms of their relationship to the underlying theory, and/or how they will assist in directly addressing the selected key question.


Criteria B – Methods of Collecting Data

Following on from the changes to this criterion for 2014, candidates are now expected to include evidence of secondary data, a risk assessment, and the use of GIS. Most of the investigations submitted were carefully planned by the Centre so that the candidates were able to use a variety of data collection methods.

Moderators reported an increasing take-up of more sophisticated GIS and visualisation techniques that allowed students to plot their results on digital overlays using software such as Google Maps, Google Earth, ArcGIS Online or Aegis. It was also acknowledged, that for some Centres, access to ICT remained a considerable challenge, but Centres are reminded that GIS and visualisation remain an important part of the controlled assessment. There is a support document concerning GIS which is available from the Pearson website. There are also GIS / Visualisation courses supporting the use of this technology being offered by The Geographical Association (GA), FSC and the RGS. Centres are reminded that whilst they are encouraged to use GIS software, candidates can still achieve full marks in this criterion through using Google Earth or Google Maps to locate their data collection survey sites, or to locate, for example, beach profiles.

For the risk assessments there was evidence of considerable variation in terms of quality and specific accountability. Moderators commented that the most effective risk assessments seen were those in tabular format, directly related to the factors that might arise from candidates' specific data collection. An example of a snapshot of a suitable risk assessment follows below.

Figure 3

Risk	Probability of risk before prevention	How to prevent the risk	Probability of risk after prevention
Getting lost in Barnard Castle  Figure 9	3	To prevent this risk, always stick to the footpaths in the town provided for you. Try to stay close to the town centre as that is a good guide to be able to tell where you are. If you have a map handy with you, use that to navigate around so too avoid getting lost. If you do manage to get lost in Barnard Castle, you should stop and ask for directions from someone passing by. Also, follow signs that can lead you back into the town centre if you do manage to get lost.	1

In general, the large majority of candidates/ Centres who had used a tabular format worked better than paragraphs, particularly with well-focused column titles. Candidates and Centres are reminded that the use of a tabular format for this criterion would not form part of the overall word count for the investigation. It is important that sufficient detail is included in relation to each of the methods conducted. Moderators commented that for 2015, whilst many candidates described their methods, there was evidence of superficial explanations along with links to their hypotheses – with general comments ‘this will help me with my hypothesis on...’ For candidates to reach the highest marks in this band there should be evidence of detailed explanation and justification for how their chosen methods will help to provide evidence to answer their chosen sub-questions/hypotheses and the overall task.

For the evaluation section of the tabular format for this criterion, Centres should encourage candidates to write this column in a different colour, to clearly distinguish when the low-level of control and high-level of control were completed.

Criteria C – Methods of Presenting Data

For 2015 this proved to be one of the criterion that witnessed considerable variations in the standard of work and marking by candidates and Centres. The majority of candidates were able to produce a suitably wide range of techniques (three or more), with two or more sophisticated techniques to reach the highest marks. Moderators commented that there was some superbly produced annotated photographs, river/ beach profiles, and located proportional base maps, however there were some Centres who marked candidates in the highest bands when the range of techniques were limited to basic line graphs and pie charts. If candidates produced just these techniques to present their data, then the marks awarded would be limited to the lower end of the level 2 band (5 marks). Alongside the range of techniques produced, candidates must produce techniques that meet the basic presentation standards; too often the presentation techniques seen lacked clear titles, labelled axis, and appropriate scales. The example below demonstrates the key expectations for the standard of each presentation technique:

Figure 4



The box below provides some guidance on what is defined as a sophisticated technique, as well as examples that would be considered as sophisticated:

Sophistication

Sophistication may often combine two techniques, processes or operations, e.g. scatter and best fit, proportional symbols or well annotated photos / and or maps, to show location with inset photos.

Other examples may include:

Dispersion diagrams,

Box and whisker plot to show the spread of data,

Kite diagrams for a vegetation transect,

Isolline maps, e.g. isochrone for travel times, isovels for velocity etc.

Choropleth maps / density shading,

Gain / loss bar charts,

Compound, divided, percentage and proportional bar charts,

Flow lines and proportional arrows / symbols,

Located and / or proportional pies / bars etc.

Radar plots,

Base maps with some annotation / details,

High quality sketch with annotations that explain OR positives and negatives,

Beach / river profiles with accurate scales.

Criterion D – Analysis and conclusions

As in previous series, this criterion tends to be the most accurately marked. Overall, the majority of candidates attain marks within level 2 of the mark scheme, through providing descriptions in some depth, along with analytical comments, drawing together some plausible conclusion against their sub-questions/ hypotheses. The most successful candidates were able to provide excellent detail across all their data sets, along with drawing together plausible conclusions with both their sub-questions/ hypotheses, and the overall task set.

Criterion E – Evaluation

2015 witnessed some improvements in the standard of evaluations seen by Moderators, although Centres are still marking this criterion leniently. Most candidates are able to provide an evaluation for their methods of data collection. Many Moderators reported that Centres were awarding the highest marks when only the data collection methods had been evaluated; this would represent only one 'aspect' of the investigation having been evaluated and therefore should be awarded a mark in level 1. For candidates to be awarded marks in level 2 and 3 of this criterion, there should be evidence of evaluation for all three 'aspects' of the study, which are the data collection methods, data presentation techniques, and the overall study. Where candidates had attempted to evaluate all the aspects of study, it was the overall study that seemed most challenging. For the top of the band, candidates should be strongly encouraged to reflect on their findings in relation to the original task set by Pearson.

Criterion F – Planning and organisation

Most of the submitted work demonstrated excellent levels of planning and organisation. The higher achieving candidates were often limited to level 2 – 4 marks as a result of the word count exceeding the 2000 limit. Centres are advised to encourage candidates to produce more succinct investigations that would enable them to achieve the highest marks in this criterion. As in previous series, many candidates are failing to provide a suitable title for their presentation techniques in order for them to accurately link within the analysis, for example *'figure 4 – located flow line map of traffic'*.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

