

OCR Geography Independent Investigation Webinar Transcript

Question: What paper work needs completing and by when?

Mark answered:

On page 65 of the A Level specification there is a run down of the three forms associated with the Independent Investigation.

Firstly, there is the Learner/teacher authentication form where both students and teachers sign the form to authenticate that the work is the students own and any guidance given is within the parameters of the specification.

Secondly, there is the Independent Investigation Proposal form. Learners use this form to detail their title, how the title links to the specification, hypotheses or sub-questions, enquiry route and suggested methods of data collection. This is a tool for you to be able to interact with the students and to provide some generic guidance and coaching in terms of whether the title is the right scope, whether it links to the specification or whether they need to think of other data collection techniques to integrate into their investigation.

Finally there is the Mark Sheet, which we also had another question about. The question was:

Will there be a specific mark scheme template to use with projects akin to the GCSE controlled assessment marking grids?

This mark sheet will have a front page which can be used to note your final agreed marks and comments, with a page for each section of the mark scheme with all of the wording from the mark scheme on it and space for more detailed notes and annotations to make your thinking clear to the moderator and for your internal standardisation of moderation.

These forms are just being worked up by our internal forms team before being released.

Question: How will be AS investigative element be examined?

Chloe answered:

Obviously there is no Independent Investigation for the AS so fieldwork is going to be examined in a different way, in the Landscape and Place Component. There are three sections within Landscape and Place, Section A: Landscape Systems, Section B, Changing Spaces; Making Places and Section C which is where fieldwork will be assessed. There are 24 marks available and there will always be a 12 mark question and you can see that in the Sample Assessment Material which you can find on the website. Some questions may be based on a resource and some on students own fieldwork experience. In terms of the

fieldwork skills which could be assessed, they are on page 36 of the specification – it gives you that level of detail in terms of the AS and in terms of the physical and human requirements of the fieldwork.

Question: I would like to know the timings for fieldwork for both AS and A2?

Mark answered:

There must be two days of fieldwork at AS and four days of fieldwork completed at A Level – but these are fieldwork requirements, not Independent Investigation requirements.

You could have a scenario where two days of fieldwork is completed in the first year of study, whilst being co-taught with an AS group, with human and physical fieldwork techniques being explored and then a further two days in the second year which are used for students' Independent Investigation. However, you could equally have a scenario where you do four days of fieldwork exploring human and physical fieldwork techniques before you even start work on the independent investigations. Remember, the two days at AS and the four days at A Level are the minimum requirements for the number of days which each student must complete for fieldwork.

In terms of hours associated with the Independent Investigation – there is no concrete time you must spend preparing students for their investigations. If you were to work out 20% of the Guided Learning Hours (GLH) for the qualification (A level Geography would have a GLH of 360 hours) then it would be 72 hours. This is too long to spend in the classroom as students can work on their Independent Investigation outside of lesson time, and even at home.

You need to put aside the number of hours that you feel prepares your students for the Independent Investigation so that you are happy that they know what to do and that they understand the requirements of the mark scheme and how to complete their fieldwork enquiry. There is no right or wrong for this and it might be very different for different schools within this webinar, but you just need to be confident that it is right for your students.

Question: How do other schools plan for AS fieldwork and then the A2 Independent Investigation when students are taught together in year 12 and some have not firmly decided that A Level Geography will be taken up?

Chloe answered:

As both Shelley and I have been Geography teachers, we do spend quite a bit of time discussing what we would do in terms of how we would approach this. When you are co-teaching, a good understanding of the enquiry process is going to be the foundation for both the AS and the A Level.

So when you are talking about this, we do need to talk about how you are going to look at this enquiry approach, and I think that one of the approaches, and I think that Mark was saying this just now, could you do your four days in Year 12? And in that four days think

about how you could best prepare your Year 12 students for their AS exams but also think about how you could upskill those students for moving up to Year 13, how you could prepare them for their Independent Investigation?

So, thinking about how many skills you could get in there in terms of fieldwork, really starting to think about the range of field work techniques, both human and physical, that you could cover with students to try to best prepare them. Not only thinking about fieldwork but also thinking about embedding the content and embedding geographical skills.

Then when you are thinking about moving onto Year 13 and the Independent Investigation you could potentially do a day where you go back and cover human and physical fieldwork skills, maybe half a day on each, getting students to think about what might for them, be the areas they are interested in and letting them decide, in terms of their titles and the areas they are choosing to focus on. What do they want to do? What data do they need to collect? I suppose that is a slightly more flexible approach in terms of how you approach the fieldwork.

Shelley answered:

So as Chloe mentioned, we have talked about if we were still teaching what would we do? We have had lots of conversations with teachers who want to bounce ideas around, thinking about their school and their context, what are the best approaches for them?

So far some of the conversations we have had with teachers we have talked about having four days of fieldwork just before Easter in the AS year. We have also talked about having 2 days at AS and very much using that to prepare for the examination, and then – as Chloe mentioned – then follow that up at A Level with a further two days at least, to get students geared up for the idea of independence so talking to them about physical and human fieldwork that they need to be doing.

Also schools have talked about strategic points of the year when it would work so focusing in the summer term on fieldwork and if you are preparing students for the AS exam then you would need to do the Easter fieldwork possibly followed up by summer term fieldwork. And thinking about the Autumn term with potential fieldwork in September/October and then working with students on their investigations up to Christmas time.

I thinking if I was still teaching I would be very tempted to drip feed in fieldwork, but particularly linked to the content I am teaching and then how can I bring in skills that are relevant? So if I was thinking about the Place content, where can I weave in fieldwork? So there is local place profiles, you could look at a particular place – so I know one of my old colleagues are looking at going to the London Docklands and the Lea Valley around Christmas time with Year 12. If I was going a landscape topic such as coasts I could potentially weave in physical geography fieldwork skills at this point.

Obviously you are teaching the content, you are also thinking about embedding geographical skills. I think there has been a bigger emphasis this year in particular on quantitative and qualitative skills and I think that will be really helpful for students to unpick that. So I would try to weave that in with a day or two in Year 12 and then a much bigger focus on the Independent Investigation in Year 13, although looking at physical and human fieldwork. So I might think about having a look at glacial fieldwork if I had already done

coasts fieldwork. I might look at more general qualitative skills and other types of human geography fieldwork techniques – so if I had already focused on interviews and questionnaires in Year 12 then I might focus on other types such as land-use mapping, ethnographic surveys, etc.

There is no right way to do it as long as you meet the fieldwork requirements and the students are set up to be independent for their own investigation and feel secure in that.

Question: How will you ensure that all establishments apply the same rules given the pressures from senior leadership to produce results?

Shelley answered:

I think one of the things that we have really tried to focus on is consistent messaging through our teacher training, through the CPD events, we have also been going out to lots of schools and been doing lots of networking. Just basically really talking carefully about independence, about what does it actually mean. In the specification we have clearly outlined the ‘musts’ and ‘must not’s’ to help students and teachers understand what they need to do to really fulfil those requirements.

The idea that students who are independent will get the most out of their investigation and they will potentially be able to access the higher mark levels if they are being as independent as possible and the mark scheme is set up like that.

We are working with the other exam boards, and trust me when I tell you that we have had this conversation many times, because one of our principle jobs is to try and ensure there is fairness and parity across centres. I also think it is very important to trust teachers professional judgement, we know that there is a lot of pressure on people for students to achieve particular grades but I think it is about building up strong support networks, building up trust between us, you as teachers, students and also sending out clear messaging across the different exam boards as well.

So we have been working with AQA, Edexcel, Eduqas, the RGS and GA, to support centres in delivering and facilitating the Independent Investigation. What we mean by that is things like exemplars, titles, proposal forms – so a whole bunch of support materials – and the idea is that between the exam boards there are lots of materials to share, that we are all sending the same message. We want to ensure that all students through the work that you do with them get a really good and rich experience doing the Independent Investigation, and obviously people are following clear policies and protocols which is why in all of the exam board specifications (from work that we did before the specifications went to Ofqual), clearly outlines what is allowed and not allowed as part of the investigation.

Question: Will OCR be producing any fieldwork tool kits like AQA have done?

Shelley answered:

In terms of support, yes we are producing materials. So at the moment the exam boards are working together and what we are producing is exemplar projects – so what we have done is raided some ‘old school’ projects so from when projects were around at A Level last time (which was around 10 years ago) and we have all pulled resources from teachers that we know – so all of the exam boards have got some exemplars.

What we are doing is working those exemplars up and working with the Principal Moderator, we had a meeting the other day with the Principal Moderator, the Chair of Examiners and ourselves as Subject Specialists where we talked through 3 exemplars covering human and physical geography. What we did was look at the mark scheme and how it could be applied and there is going to be a commentary with lots of hints and tips, having a think about how those projects could be worked up.

Currently we have a fieldwork guide in production and that is looking at progression of skills from Key Stage 3 through to A Level, so having a think about how those skills increase, particularly with the emphasis on and supporting learners to become independent. We know that we are dealing with some Sixth Form Colleges and some 11 to 18 establishments. Thinking about embedding fieldwork skills so when we talk about that, which is an OCR message, what are we actually talking about with exemplars? Some ideas about physical and human fieldwork, including things which we are doing with the other exam boards on titles and enquiry based approach.

The other thing which we have also got is a Digital Toolkit which is an online tool which is interactive for students use. That has been developed by an external company, very excitingly it is at an early stage of its development. So part of the toolkit is worked up and we are going to test it with a number of different centres and the idea is to get it fully functional as a product which is bespoke to OCR. So we will keep you posted on that – very exciting!

Question: Any independent investigation exemplars?

Chloe answered:

Shelley spoke earlier about the old style projects that we are working on to create a teaching and learning resource that hopefully will be really useful to help give you an idea about where things are at, especially when looking at things like the mark scheme. So, the Principal Moderators, the Chair of Examiners and we as Subject Specialists have already met to go through these project and they will have, as Shelley mentioned, a commentary, with reference to the mark scheme, written by the Principal Moderator.

The idea is that they are not supposed to be perfect projects and they are supposed to show you through the commentary, through the hints and tips, what that particular project would have to do in order to actually access the range of levels and to increase its level within the mark scheme. So the idea is that we are not putting out perfect projects, but we want to give examples of how you could potentially improve upon a project in terms of looking at how

students could access the mark schemes. As part of that idea in the form that questions should enable your students to really access the mark schemes, so that is one of the things with we were really keen on doing.

There is a real range of examples in there, so there is a coast example, a glaciated example and a human geography example. So that will hopefully give a relatively good range of different examples, and that is one of the things we are working on now, so hopefully they will be available relatively soon.

Mark added:

We have had a couple of questions come in regarding the exemplar projects, when they might be published and if they can be shown to students.

We will be publishing these on our website so therefore we are going to be sharing them publicly. Obviously if we are sharing them on our website then students could access them on there, so you are absolutely fine to share these exemplars with your students. We are hoping that they are going to be published by the end of this term – I say hoping because our Principal Moderator is going to have to create the commentary around them and we are going to have to set them up in terms of how they look. We are currently getting them in that stage right now, so we are very much hoping that they are going to be available by the end of this term.

Question: When should we start projects if students are doing the two year course?

Shelley answered:

The Field Studies Council have been really good in terms of producing a lot of work on this and talking to us about this – and we have been doing some training with them for the last 2 to 3 years – in terms of thinking about the Independent Investigation. It seems that if you are doing a 2 year course and you are not locked down in terms of preparing students for an AS exam, that lots of teachers are planning on starting in the summer term, with students doing some independent work over the summer holidays. Having been in that situation myself a few years ago, sometimes there was a horrifying moment in September when you realise just how little some students have done but I suppose that depends on how truly independent and motivated your students are likely to be.

So far in talking to teachers, we have had people talking about doing a chunk of fieldwork over Easter and following up with the Independent Investigation in the summer term. People have been talking about summer term exams and then doing work on the Independent Investigation. People have also been talking about starting it in the Autumn, so doing some fieldwork techniques in the summer but then the bulk of the Independent Investigation work to be done in the Autumn when teachers can work more closely with students in terms of monitoring and ensuring that they are actually working through the Independent Investigation.

Question: We have some queries around terminology – such as can students use LIC, HIC, NEE, etc as they might have been at GCSE? OCR seems to have a different range. Will students be penalised?

Mark answered:

Students would need to be familiar with OCR terminology as these words and acronyms are part of the specification content and so LIDCs, EDCs and ACs could be used in exam questions. But if students use different terminology as part of their Independent Investigation then as long as they are clear, consistent and relevant then it shouldn't be an issue.

We did write a website article explaining why we chose the IMF classifications, if anyone is interested then you can find it here:

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/by-subject/geography/geography-news/why-acs-edcs-and-lidcs/>

Question: Of course I know whatever they produce would have to follow the sequence of investigation, be geographical and meet the assessment criteria, but what I'm asking is would an idea like 'virtual space' be okay or are there limits on what you would accept?

Shelley answered:

We talked about this at some length yesterday and I think there probably are certain limits and that would be about you as a teacher discussing that with your students. Our thoughts about this were about the accessibility of this for a 16 or 17 year old, in terms of the intellectual level that they might be able to meet, this is getting towards a very conceptual question so I think that this might be quite challenging.

We also spoke about how closely this linked to the specification and we ended up having quite a considerable debate about that. I think that if you are searching and making very tenuous and broad links to the specification then that would be an investigation that you would want to think very carefully about whether you would your students to pursue that. Don't forget that we are always here to support as well – so whatever the question the student comes up with, the theme needs to be linked to at least one bullet point in the specification or key idea. So in terms of whether a student will pursue a question not, thought needs to go into whether it is linked to the spec and whether it is going to be too challenging for them. I think there does need to be a hook somewhere – a geographical hook, a conceptual hook and this one is tipping the balance in terms of being a bit too hard.

Chloe answered:

Feeding into that then, I think it comes down to what fieldwork is going to be done which will give valuable data for analysis. Like Shelley said, if you have got to find those tenuous links to the specification or you are not sure what data the student is going to be able to collect in order to answer the question, then I think that will be quite selective in a way to actually support you in order to let you know what they can and can't do.

When in the planning phase as well, asking does that question actually allow access to the mark scheme and the full the full mark range? That comes down to the valuable discussion at the Proposal Form stage which I think Shelley spoke about briefly earlier, in terms of thinking about the title, about what data they will actually be collecting and the scale of the investigation as well.

Questions: How do you get GIS into the project if we don't have GIS facilities at school?

What is meant by digital geo-located data? Do students need to collect data digitally and / or present data using GIS?

Mark answered:

We purposefully used the words geo-located data rather than GIS in the mark scheme as we were aware that many schools do not have access to GIS software or online subscriptions. So, geo-located data does not mean that it has to be done online, it can be locating graphs on a hard copy of a map for example, so it does allow you to access those parts of the mark schemes no matter what.

Digital data can mean a number of things to different people and students could come about this in different ways. So now there are a number of apps, like decibel meters, that mean that their mobile phones and iPads will be great tools for this. But then it might be that how students access data in a digital way is about how they store their collected data through presentations and spread sheets.

So with GIS, if you have the capability and the students have the skills then that is fantastic, but for the Independent Investigation it is not necessary in terms of accessing the full range of marks as the wording 'geo-located data' has been instead.

Questions: Do all students have to do different primary data or can they all study say coastal and then look at different elements?

What balance of primary and secondary data is allowed ie how much primary data is needed?

Shelley answered:

In terms of primary data, because students are doing an Independent Investigation there are a couple of ways of looking at this. So if you are going out and doing fieldwork and you are teaching students a range of fieldwork skills, so if you were doing a coastal study for example you might be taking them through a range of primary data collection techniques, then obviously students can collaborate and that is separate to the actual independent investigation.

In terms of where it says 'can they all study say coastal and then look at different elements', I think the thing that is important is to maintain that independent element. So if students have

their own titles that they have independently developed, then it would not be a case of going on a coastal fieldtrip and then them coming up with their questions. Maybe another way of doing it would be for them to come up with their questions and then to have a look at the type of primary data collection techniques that they would actually need to do.

The other question refers to the balance of primary and secondary data collection which I think is relevant to talk about here, the key to it really is; what is the question that the student is asking? They need to clearly justify what routeway they have taken. So if their project lends itself to a largely primary data collection project – that is absolutely fine. If it is a largely secondary based project that is fine as well, but there would need to be an element of primary data collection.

We have also said in the specification that if students want to use an unmanipulated primary data set, so we have spoken to a number of universities who have said that where a project is challenging (for example on Disease, on Food, on Oceans, on Climate Change), actually going out and collecting that primary data would be really challenging. So what they can do is access a primary data bank, so it could be from the Oceanographic Institute, it could be the Office of National Statistics, whatever it might be. Use that unmanipulated data, that raw data, so in terms of collecting their own primary data it could be an interview with the Oceanographic Institute, it could be anything where they are engaging with a type of fieldwork activity themselves. So as long as it makes sense for their own Independent Investigation and they can justify it then it is absolutely fine.

Questions: Do they have to have physical and human in the same topic or can it be one of each?

Can fieldwork be based on debate topics that have not been studied in school?

Mark answered:

Just to clarify, the fieldwork requirements mean that fieldwork has to include physical fieldwork processes and human fieldwork processes but the Independent Investigation can be on any element of the specification that the student chooses. So it can be purely physical, it can be solely human or it can be people-environment and on the ‘Geographical Debates’ topics.

However, whilst it is open to students, if you as a department in a school want to say ‘actually, we would only be comfortable marking on the topics that we have taught as that is where we have expertise and we do not want student undertaking Independent Investigations on topics that are options that we haven’t chosen to teach’ then you can say that. So you can say at the start that you only want Independent Investigations on the elements that we have taught – that is your choice.

Questions: Have you been working with FSC and are they aware of the requirements of your investigation?

Are there specific FSC centres that you have worked with more than others?

Shelley answered:

Yes, we have been working with the Field Studies Council. For the last 3 years we have been doing some training with them. So at the beginning of September they have 3 days training for all of their staff where they exchange resources, pool their expertise, they get all their staff on-board and working together. Obviously different centres have different levels of expertise depending on where they are located geographically.

We have done a lot of training on them in terms of the mark scheme, we have done training in terms of fieldwork questions at AS, we have looked at physical and human types of fieldwork. On the FSC website one thing that is really good, if you look at particular centres it tells you about their programme they are running, quite a lot of the time centres have sent materials to us and we have looked through and they have asked whether we have met the spec. Because a lot of them are biologists, chemists, geographers and they have a huge amount of expertise in terms of quantitative skills and with physical geography fieldwork.

Where they felt less secure in terms of human geography fieldwork and qualitative skills they have done training, so for example Chloe and I went this September and we actually did a 'place' fieldwork session with them on enquiry skills, critical questioning and critical reflection. So we actually took, quite scarily, took the FSC staff out on fieldwork in Shrewsbury. So they have worked extremely hard getting their head around the new requirements. Bearing in mind they do all of the different Exam Boards, so the different nuances of the mark schemes they have had to get to grips with.

What has really helped is that the different Exam Boards have worked together to come up with support materials, to come up with information, and also what has gone into the specifications has helped come up with clear messaging. So they have worked really hard to get themselves up to speed with that. We continue to have conversations; I have had emails this week in the Geography team to talk about the drylands fieldwork for example.

So looking at the second question: 'Are there specific FSC centres that you have worked with more than others?' Yes there are. So we have been to Shrewsbury a few times in terms of the fieldwork centre (Preston Montford) which is based there, we have worked with staff from across a range of FSC centres. Nick Laphorn, who is soon to become the new GA President, we have actually worked with for a while and he has delivered some of our training. So if you have booked onto our fieldwork CPD which is coming up, he is based at one of the FSC centres (Nettlecombe) and he is going to be delivering the training for us. So we do a lot of work with them.

I don't know about recommending centres because we haven't been as teachers or as members of staff, but I would say that for the FSC staff members that I have met, I have been very impressed with.

Question: Could candidates use environmental models to generate secondary data either to test hypotheses or supplement analysis e.g. precipitation/surface runoff models?

Shelley answered:

I would say that using any sort of models or concepts would be extremely valuable. I used to teach the IB and within the extended essay it was one of the things which enabled students to access the higher mark levels within the mark scheme. Now, I'm not suggesting our mark scheme does that but I always talk about the idea of a geographical and conceptual hook. I think what happens with models is that what you find in reality when out doing the kind of 'messy' fieldwork, it gives a framework with which to analyse against. Although for some students it can tip them over the edge because it can be very challenging. Obviously if you are teaching about those things and students want to bring them in, then that can be a really exciting element to their investigation.

Questions: Will the mark scheme show clearly the level of data presentation and statistical analysis required to access the higher marks?

If human investigations don't have quantitative statistical analysis techniques, such as spearmans or chi-squared, will their section 4 marks be limited?

Mark answered:

With the data presentation techniques, for example, we have in the top level 'an appropriate balance of simple and more sophisticated data representation methods' but key as well is that it is 'relevant to the topic'. Something which is quite simple can become more sophisticated. For example, pie charts, which I think most people would agree is quite a simple technique the vast majority of the time, become much more sophisticated when they are mapped. So it does not necessarily mean that the whole way through students need to think of some very sophisticated presentation methods, but they do need to ask 'what is the most appropriate?' and 'what is the most relevant?' way I can get this across – and making sure that it is relevant to the data that they have.

In terms of statistical analysis, what we have said within the mark scheme is that it should be appropriate to the topic. Again, where the question asks what if human investigations don't have quantitative statistical analysis techniques, well that is fine as long as it is appropriate to the topic. You should not be shoehorning things in just to tick it off.

Shelley added:

In terms of the human techniques, one of the things that it might be useful to have a think about – and it does mention it in the specification under qualitative skills – is that if students are doing a largely human-based project then they could do coding techniques. So in terms of statistical analysis, if they were looking at sections of text (for example emotional attachment to place or rebranding), any kind of literature or if they have done a questionnaire or interview and they were to type out all the information from participants answers, then

students could come up with particular categories (which is what we mean by coding – sorry if I am preaching to the converted here!). So they might group ideas about emotional attachment to place, they can then code that data and you can either analyse it as coded data looking for links to theories or concepts or ideas – or you can turn that coded data into numerical form. So you look at the number of times particular types of words appear, those would also be talked about in terms of statistical analysis techniques. If you were to use a questionnaire and you were to use a Likert scale, where you sometimes have to categorise your answers from 1 to 5, how much you like or dislike something, those can be changed into statistical tables which students could then do an analysis on and that would still be counted as statistical analysis.

So it would not have to be as sophisticated as Spearman's or Chi-squared, but this is where it must be highly relevant to what the student actually wants to find out – and the more relevant it is, the more likely it is they will access higher levels within the mark scheme as it tells a logical story throughout that investigation.

Mark added:

I think the words 'appropriate' and 'relevant' are words that you will constantly see in the higher levels of the mark scheme, so they are very important words to make sure students are aware of when it comes to choosing their analytical and presentation techniques.

Question: When will the material be available to aid planning?

Please can you provide a summary timescale as to when your support materials will be available.

Chloe answered:

In terms of timescales for the support material which we are planning to produce, we are looking at the end of this term or early next term. We are really conscious however that we want to do as much as we can to support you and that these resources are time sensitive. So if you find yourself with specific questions then please do get in contact with us – you can email us at geography@ocr.org.uk and we can do our best to support you if you have any particular questions or queries. We will always do our best to support you wherever we can but realistically we are looking at the end of this term for the new resources hopefully.

Question: Can candidates collect their primary data as part of a group or does it have to be collected individually?

Mark answered:

They can do it either way – it depends on what data they need to collect and what is the most appropriate way of doing so. As it says in the specification, primary data can be collected as part of a group and it can also be collected individually depending on what needs to be collected.

Question: Can we provide tables, etc to help pupils record primary data collection in the field?

Shelley answered:

The emphasis of the investigation is very much about independence and it does not mean independence as in 'individual'. I certainly used to encourage my students (for the controlled assessment) when doing the fieldwork, to create their own data collection recording sheets even though they were all collecting the same things –. The emphasis for A Level with independence means that the more ownership they can have the better it is going to be, so what we wouldn't want to see is groups of students with the same data collection sheet because it needs to be an independent piece of work for their primary data collection. It doesn't mean however that they can't collaborate, collect similar things.

If you wanted to do it on a group fieldwork trip for the physical and human fieldwork requirements, and you provide them with a framework, a data collection sheet – absolutely fine. But there's the differential between that and the Independent Investigation, where the students need to take full ownership from the title right through. But the actual data collection, the health and safety, the risk assessment, could be done collaboratively.

Question: Did you receive my emailed question about the amount of "daylight" needed between students' titles?

Mark answered:

The key to this is that it is an independent investigation and it must be an independent title – but it does not have to be an individual title. What that means is that the student must come up with the title themselves. If they come up with the same title as somebody else, or a very similar title as somebody else, then as long as they have done it independently (and you are happy that they have done it independently) and this can be showcased from the Proposal Form then that is absolutely fine.

An analogy we used in the team at one point, which I quite liked actually, was if you go to a party and you are wearing the exact same dress as somebody else then you might not have called them before to decide what you should wear that night. So it is about making sure it is an independent title as opposed to worrying about the individuality of each title. If the student has come up with it themselves then it is absolutely fine.

Question: If we have a departmental library of past A Level projects can we share these with pupils?

Chloe answered:

I think that you can share these with your students but I think we are all aware that this needs to be done with a little bit of caution, especially if they see something fantastic then

are they going to want to replicate and copy that. I don't think there is necessarily harm in sharing it with students but you have to be wary that you want individuals coming up with their own titles. But there is no reason why they cannot see something if you have some good examples of best practice within there – and if you have still got those things within the cupboard then that might be quite a useful resource.

Obviously you will also have the 'old-style' projects that we are working up with the mark scheme applied to them, so that will be three there anyway. But just show them past projects with a word of caution as you do not want to take away any independence.

Questions: If a pupil wants to apply a complex data analysis skill (e.g. with a GIS application), how much help can we give the pupil before it affects their ability to gain higher level marks?

Shelley answered:

With regards to this, it can be a bit challenging as it depends upon how much support the student has been given. If you were looking at all of the students across the class, is one student being taken forward much more with their Independent Investigation than others? However, we very aware that some particular skills actually need direct teaching and to support the students direct understanding.

My thought would be that you would perhaps model and talk through those ideas using an alternative example to the one that students might be using, so it is like teaching students a general GIS skill just like teaching how to use an OS map. Then it is their application of the skills that you have taught them and their ability to be able to transfer that knowledge and be able to move that forward.

I think if you are giving them direct access to information and understanding and showing them how to use a particular tool or an application and it furthers their understanding for a direct impact on their investigation, my question would be 'are you advantaging them over the other students?' This is when it comes back to parity in terms of: is that fair on the rest of the learners because they are not getting access to the same information? It is the same as directing students to a particular resource if they were not aware, instead you might have a resource bank and they can choose to utilise that information themselves.

Question: In the upcoming two OCR courses 'How to tackle the investigation' and 'how to mark' will there be specific training for teachers to how to teach the specification if they're new to geography e.g. GIS and geo-locating data?

Shelley answered:

In terms of 'How to tackle the Independent Investigation', what we have tried to do is focus on the things that teachers are asking us – so when you email us in we try to use that within what we are trying to do within the CPD – so for example we have a bit more of a focus on qualitative and quantitative skills in terms of tackling the Independent Investigation and the types of things which can be done in particular around qualitative skills.

In terms of teaching the specification, we do get lots of direct emails asking what does this wording mean in the specification? Do you have any particular resources? We talk to teachers and bounce ideas around about the specifications. In terms of how to mark the investigation CPD, that is very much about taking some exemplars and applying the mark scheme to those in terms of the process – what would you actually do, what are you looking for? We are utilising a lot of expertise there, so how to mark we have been working with the Principal Moderator (who is likely to be doing all of the presentations himself anyway) and that is David Holmes – and he has also done a lot of training with the FSC. So we are trying to do a lot of connective working in terms of people having the same information. The person who the 'Tackling the Independent Investigation' is Bob Digby who has been working really closely with us, so we are really pleased to have them delivering the sessions.

Question: What is the topic of the human investigation exemplar?

Chloe answered:

The human topic we have got, which fits into the place topic, looks at the use and perception of the high street in Barnet.

Question: When we will know the grade boundaries for these?

Mark answered:

Unfortunately the same as us, it will not be until the first summer of assessment and the first cohort have been properly marked. The grade boundaries are all set together at that point – they can't be set beforehand because the standard is based on the entirety of the exams and the non-exam assessment. So all of that will come together in June 2018, which we are all very much looking forward to I'm sure!