

**A LEVEL**

**Moderators' report**

# **GEOGRAPHY**

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**H481**

For first teaching in 2016

**H481/04/05 Summer 2024 series**

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## Introduction

Our moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

## Online courses

We have created Online Courses to build your confidence in delivering, marking and administering internal assessment for our qualifications. Courses are available for Cambridge Nationals, GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016).

### Cambridge Nationals

All teachers delivering our redeveloped Cambridge Nationals suite from September 2022 are asked to complete the Essentials for the NEA course, which describes how to guide and support your students. You'll receive a certificate which you should retain.

Following this you can also complete a subject-specific Focus on Internal Assessment course for your individual Cambridge Nationals qualification, covering marking and delivery.

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We recommend all teachers complete the introductory module Building your Confidence in Internal Assessment, which covers key internal assessment and standardisation principles.

Following this you will find a subject-specific course for your individual qualification, covering marking criteria with examples and commentary, along with interactive marking practice.

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## General overview

As in previous years, the majority of candidates in 2024 chose to investigate aspects of the specification related to Changing Spaces: Making Places. Reports on coastal processes, landforms and management continue to make a significant contribution, while the number of reports submitted on carbon and water cycles seem to have increased slightly across the total cohort.

The majority of centres continue to promote good practice: facilitating investigations that clearly focus on areas of personal interest to individual candidates and which have obviously been conducted independently. Many candidates have an excellent grasp of what constitutes an effective investigation and many NEAs are a pleasure to read. Spectacular NEAs are submitted and the moderators are always pleased to find highly focused investigations of small-scale geographical issues such as the perception of graffiti, the use of hostile architecture in a regeneration project or the extent to which a neighbourhood park provides quality of life benefits to local residents. Those centres with very large cohorts, such as those in Cambridge, Huddersfield and Colchester, should be publicly commended for inspiring large numbers of candidates to develop imaginative, personalised investigations that show clear evidence of independence. The fact that such large centres can inspire truly independent investigations, usually based on issues local to their centre, proves that any centre can do it.

The trend noted in 2023, of a greater reliance on investigations conducted during residential fieldwork, sometimes facilitated by third party providers, has continued. As my report said in 2023, residential fieldwork has many advantages, but in a growing number of cases seen this year, it has proved that it can provide challenges for the NEA. In 2024 moderators saw examples of centres where most (in some cases, all) of the candidates were investigating the same issue, using similarly worded investigation titles, and the same methods to collect, represent and analyse data. This situation impacts the integrity of the assessment and, in the worst cases, moderators felt obliged to ask the compliance team at OCR to investigate. All centres are reminded of the need to keep to the descriptions of the level of independence at each stage of the investigation that are detailed on page 54 of the specification. The submission of similar NEAs also affects the accuracy of marking as it becomes difficult to apply the upper level of some aspects of the marking criteria to reports that have been written in these circumstances. For example, it can be difficult to find evidence of 'valid and individual literature research' (Section 1, Level 3) or 'clear evidence of personalised methodologies' (Section 2, Level 3) when all of the candidates have used the same methods. It can also be difficult to find evidence of 'appropriate and selective presentation' (Section 3, Level 3) when candidates are using new and unfamiliar methods of data presentation that they have just learned as part of a fieldwork experience.

Two further observations noted in 2024, was the use of AI in written reports which had not been acknowledged by either the candidate or teacher assessor in either the NEA or form GCW159.

Of equal concern were the potential use of a template to help candidates structure either part of the report (such as a template for construction of identical headings in a methodology table) or to provide prescribed subheadings for the sub-sections of the whole report. Where moderators suspected that a template had been used, this concern was reported to the compliance team. All centres are reminded of the need to keep to the teacher guidance for Investigative Geography that are detailed on pages 52-53 of the specification.

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provided very clear aims in the introduction and justified their investigation</li> <li>discussed a valid sampling framework that was justified</li> <li>chose appropriate methods to represent their data, including representations of spatial data or other more sophisticated techniques</li> <li>used a range of quantitative and qualitative methods to effectively analyse their data and linked back to wider theory</li> <li>drew sensible, evidenced conclusions and demonstrated that they understood wider geographical theory</li> <li>referenced literature sources throughout the report.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>had unclear aims and/or tried to achieve too much or focused on too large a geographical area</li> <li>named a sampling strategy but did not provide any detail or justification</li> <li>used only simple methods of data presentation</li> <li>described maps and graphs without using any quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis</li> <li>repeated key findings in the conclusion but links to wider geographical theory were absent</li> <li>referenced literature sources in the introduction only.</li> </ul>

## Administration

The majority of centres administered the NEA faultlessly with all of the essential paperwork completed correctly. Moderators are always grateful to see efficient administration which makes the process of moderation run smoothly.

The moderation team would be grateful if all centres could take note of the following points:

- Missing candidate numbers. To save any confusion it is important to record the correct candidate number on **every** NEA, proposal form and mark recording sheet.
- Missing 'Candidate Record Form and Centre Declaration' sheet GCW179. Geography remains one of a handful of subjects where this form, duly signed by each candidate and teacher, is submitted with the sample.
- Proposal Form. It is expected that centres include the Independent Investigation Proposal Form for each candidate.
- It is important that each written report is secured. The use of a hole punch and treasury tag is the most effective and simplest method. Loose pages must not be submitted. Please avoid using plastic wallets or other bulky folders.
- Annotation of mark sheets. Please highlight the level criteria met by each candidate on **each** of the **six** separate sheets. Then make direct reference to places in the candidates' report where evidence of work meeting the standard of the criteria can be found. For example, in section 4, you might refer to 'Mann-Whitney' being used on 'page 14'.

For work that is uploaded to 'Submit for Assessment'

- Please make sure that centre and candidate numbers are recorded on every scanned document.
- Please check that every page is scanned in the correct order. We did see examples of reports that were scanned with jumbled pages or missing pages. This created a lot of unnecessary additional work for moderators.

## Interpretation of the marking criteria

As in 2023, marking was, in many cases, closely in line with the published marking criteria and accurate – at least within the correct level – across all six sections. However, there seems to have been an upward trend in the number of centres that have not fully standardised their own marking with the national standard. It is easy to understand why a centre of, for example 12 candidates, would not be aware of the full range of ability across the cohort. To help all centres to standardise their marking against the national standard, the moderators have selected well marked examples that may be downloaded from the Teach Cambridge website. Please use the commentaries that go alongside these examples to standardise marking in your own centre. There is a self-guided training course on OCR Train with integrated candidate exemplars, this can support with application of the marking criteria.

Where marking was inaccurate, generous application of the marking criteria was more common than severe application of the marking criteria. Generous marking was seen in all six sections of the marking criteria.

Misunderstanding of the marking criteria was most commonly seen in:

- Section 2; to give a mark in Level 3 the sampling framework should be 'appropriate, coherent and justified'. The moderator expects to see details such as the 'frequency, range and location choice'.
- Section 3; to give a mark in Level 3 candidates need to have used an 'appropriate balance of simple and **more sophisticated** data representation methods.'
- Section 4; to access marks in the upper two levels of the marking criteria for Section 4 candidates must provide evidence that they can apply appropriate methods to analyse quantitative data (such as measures of central tendency, measures of dispersal, or statistical tests) and/or appropriate methods to analyse qualitative data (such as simple text analysis, coding or effective annotation of images).
- Section 6; to give a mark in Level 3 candidates need to have stated the sources and literature references clearly and accurately **throughout** the investigation.

## Commentary on specific issues

Rather than describe each section of an investigation, the following report highlights some aspects of the reports that are either done well, or which could be improved.

### 1 Writing concisely

As you will be aware, it is recommended that candidates write between 3,000 and 4,000 words. This recommended word length is usually exceeded – often by a significant margin. Some centres do submit concise reports. This suggests that some teachers have an effective strategy that they share with students. Here are some tips that might help reduce the word count.

- Use the proposal form to steer candidates away from a title that compares two places. They are doubling the workload.
- Tell candidates that they do not need to provide a glossary of key terms in the introduction.
- Advise candidates to use, on average, no more than three pieces of literature to support the discussion of theory in the introduction. Keep the literature review down to 300 words. It should not be presented as an essay in its own right. It should relate directly to the investigation.
- Suggest that candidates have two or three research questions (rather than more) and use these to structure the analysis and conclusion sections.
- Suggest a word count for each section of the report that adds up to no more than 4,000 words.

- Advise candidates to focus on discussing and justifying the sampling rather than describing too much detail of data collection methods. Candidates should imagine they are writing for an informed audience. The reader knows what a ranging pole is and how to use it on a beach to help measure profiles. What the reader doesn't know is where exactly the candidate decided to collect data on the beach, how far apart these points were, and how the points were chosen.
- Tell candidates not to include a risk assessment.
- Arrange the analysis section around the research questions rather than around individual forms of data processing.
- Advise candidates to avoid repetition. In particular:
  - do not repeat the analysis in the conclusions section. The conclusions should be substantiated with key evidence, but they should be concise.
  - do not repeat the limitations of the data collection in the evaluation section. The evaluation should take a more holistic view of the validity and reliability of the investigation as a whole.

### Key point – literature research

The literature research should not be evidenced in a lengthy 'stand-alone' essay in the introduction. It should be used concisely to outline the theory, issue or concept that is being investigated. Candidates should remember to refer back to this literature in the analysis and conclusion sections.

### Misconception



It is not necessary to develop a space/place title around the comparison of two places. It is better to focus on patterns, trends, correlations, or variations (for example, in perceptions) in **one**, well defined location. Where candidates select two contrasting neighbourhoods to 'prove' that deprivation is worse in one place than other, they are in danger of confirmation bias. It would be better to investigate how deprivation varies along one or more transects, for example, focusing on the distance decay effect of a positive or negative externality such as a busy road or urban green space.

## 2 Personalised data collection

Evidence of 'personalised' data collection is a useful differentiator in the marking criteria. Candidates who do this well (and many do) usually describe their data collection in prose rather than in a table. They often focus on two or three valid methods of data collection (rather than five or more) and use these methods to collect a lot of data. They show evidence of 'personalised' data collection by, for example:

- selectively listing some of the more important questions in their questionnaire, and explain why they chose these questions
- creating their own Environmental Quality Index, rather than lifting one from a website, and explain how they constructed it.

Other candidates struggle to show how they have 'personalised' their data collection. In some centres it becomes obvious that all candidates have learned a set of five or more data collection techniques and have used them all, irrespective of the nuance of their aims. Candidates who perform less well against these marking criteria tend to:

- collect tiny amounts of data across a wide range of methods
- use methods without thinking whether they will provide data that is relevant and valid to answer their aims

- state that they have used an EQI or questionnaire without discussing how they adapted it to make it fit for purpose.

Some candidates who had conducted residential fieldwork in places such as Southwold, Swanage or Stratford, London, rarely showed evidence of 'personalised' data collection.

One particular method that was seen in reports from several centres this year is highly problematic – that of using skin colour from observation of public crowds as a means of determining ethnicity. Not only is this likely to lead to inaccurate and unreliable data it is also an unethical method of research and many members of the public would find this highly offensive. Please monitor proposal forms for this type of suggestion and give appropriate feedback.

### Misconception



Bipolar analysis, which is a great data collection method at Key Stage 2 and 3, is not the same, or as effective, as an Environmental Quality Index. Bipolar surveys are highly subjective. At this level they are only really valid if the researcher uses them to ask members of the public about how they feel rather than completing the survey themselves. If A Level candidates want to collect data that is valid and personalised, they should be constructing their own EQIs that use measurable criteria.

## 3 The sampling framework

The sampling framework has been a recurring theme in Principal Moderator reports. Many candidates do little more than name the strategy they have used as being systematic, random, stratified, pragmatic or opportunistic. Candidates who show better practice go on to describe how many sample points they chose and some go on to explain that they used random numbers to select the random sample. This year we have seen over 200 NEAs. In that sample we saw a selection of excellent accounts of the sampling strategy. One, for example, described how and why an opportunistic sample was chosen for a face-to-face questionnaire, with a detailed discussion of the size of the sample and why this may or may not have been representative of the population as a whole. Another candidate, investigating infiltration, described how stratified sampling was used to select an appropriate proportion of samples from areas of different vegetation types, and how a random number generator and grid were used to select actual sample sites.

### Key point – sampling frameworks

The sampling framework is an important element of Section 2. Many candidates seem to have only a limited understanding of sampling. The teaching of sampling frameworks should be a priority for any fieldwork undertaken.



## Misconception



Stratified sampling is not the same as systematic sampling. A lot of candidates state they have used stratified sampling when data has been collected at regular intervals: this is systematic sampling. An even larger group of candidates state they have used stratified sampling when they have been pragmatic in choosing a variety of locations. For example, it is incorrect to state that taking some sediment samples from an unmanaged beach and some from a managed beach (with groynes) is stratified: it's a pragmatic comparison, or form of control in the experiment. Stratified sampling means that the following steps have been taken:

1. Strata have been identified in the population, such as rock type or vegetation in an infiltration investigation.
2. The proportion of each strata has been calculated.
3. A valid number of samples has been taken, in proportion to point two above. These samples must also be selected using a sampling strategy – either systematically, using random numbers, or opportunistically.

## 4 Data presentation techniques

Data presentation remains an area of strength within the NEA for many candidates. Candidates should be commended because this section is not necessarily easy. To be successful they need to:

- collect sufficient data to make the presentation valid, for example, having at least ten pairs of data to draw a scatter graph
- select an appropriate form of data presentation, for example, avoiding a line graph when the data is discrete
- demonstrate a range of techniques, including some that are sophisticated, for example, a map with located bars or other proportional symbols. This requires foresight: they need to propose an investigation that includes the collection of spatial data
- select the most influential data to graph. This means that successful candidates avoid drawing dozens of similar bar graphs or pie charts to illustrate every question in a questionnaire.

Some forms of more sophisticated data presentation are still rare: these include field sketches, flow line maps (with proportional width arrows), isoline maps and choropleths constructed using primary data. The use of GIS to create proportional circles is becoming widespread, but it should not automatically be credited as a 'sophisticated technique' and given a Level 3 mark. See the key point below.

## Key point – use of GIS mapping

GIS packages are frequently used to generate proportional circles. However, the technique is often inappropriate. Proportional circles are effective when displaying data that has a very great range. If the range is small, then the circles are all similar in size and candidates should be selecting another method. GIS 'heat maps' are also ineffective and probably ought not to be used unless the candidate has collected a great deal of data at sampling points that are sufficiently close together for the map to show any variations. Where candidates use Excel or GIS to create a map or graph they should remember to add a suitable axis label, title, key and/or scale.

## 4 Data analysis and explanation

The good news is that the number of candidates using basic numeracy (such as mean or IQR) and statistical tests (such as Chi Squared or Spearman's Rank) is gradually increasing. Centres and candidates should be commended for this trend – although it would be nice to see even more candidates apply one or more analytical methods to their data.

Marking of the analysis section, however, remains inconsistent. Many centres know how to apply the marking criteria accurately, especially those who have a large number of candidates who use statistical tests. However, in other centres, the limited use of a statistical test (Level 2) is sometimes marked with generosity (Level 4). Like anything in the NEA, statistical tests can be done well, or done badly, and this must be reflected in the marking.

When the statistical test is performed effectively:	When the statistical test is performed with limited success:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the context is stated – it is clear what the candidate is trying to discover</li> <li>the null hypothesis is stated</li> <li>the data and working out are shown in the main body of the report</li> <li>the significance of the result is explained using significance tables</li> <li>the result is interpreted – it is clear what the candidate discovered</li> <li>the result is linked to theory and, in the best case, it is linked to the literature research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the wrong test is chosen (see the misconception box)</li> <li>the reason for using the test is not explained</li> <li>the null hypothesis is not stated</li> <li>insufficient data is used, for example, fewer than ten pairs of data in a Spearman's Rank test or values lower than five in the 'expected (E)' column of a Chi Squared test</li> <li>the data and working out are not shown</li> <li>the significance of the result is not understood or discussed.</li> </ul>

### Key point – understanding data requirements

Many candidates need greater confidence in their numeracy before they begin the NEA so that they know which methods are valid with which data. Examples were seen where there was insufficient data to conduct a test. Spearman's Rank needs at least ten pairs of data to make the test valid. Knowing this, a candidate can justify that they need at least ten sample points on their transect when they are discussing the sampling framework.

### Misconception



This year candidates from a number of different centres were trying to test a correlation between house prices and time by drawing scatter graphs and conducting Spearman's Rank statistical tests. This type of test is not valid for this data. Scatter graphs and Spearman's Rank are used to test a correlation where a causal link is suspected – a scatter graph is used to plot an independent variable against a dependent variable. There is no causal link between house prices and time – a line graph would be appropriate because it would show a trend over time. House prices (a dependent variable) are affected by supply and demand (independent variables) not by time.

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## Enhance your skills and confidence in internal assessment

### What are our online courses?

Our online courses are self-paced eLearning courses designed to help you deliver, mark and administer internal assessment for our qualifications. They are suitable for both new and experienced teachers who want to refresh their knowledge and practice.

### Why should you use our online courses?

With these online courses you will:

- learn about the key principles and processes of internal assessment and standardisation
- gain a deeper understanding of the marking criteria and how to apply them consistently and accurately
- see examples of student work with commentary and feedback from OCR moderators
- have the opportunity to practise marking and compare your judgements with those of OCR moderators
- receive instant feedback and guidance on your marking and standardisation skills
- be able to track your progress and achievements through the courses.

### How can you access our online courses?

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Access the courses **anytime, anywhere and at your own pace**. You can also revisit the courses as many times as you need.

### Which courses are available?

There are **two types** of online course: an **introductory module** and **subject-specific** courses.

The introductory module, Building your Confidence in Internal Assessment, is designed for all teachers who are involved in internal assessment for our qualifications. It covers the following topics:

- the purpose and benefits of internal assessment
- the roles and responsibilities of teachers, assessors, internal verifiers and moderators
- the principles and methods of standardisation
- the best practices for collecting, storing and submitting evidence
- the common issues and challenges in internal assessment and how to avoid them.

The subject-specific courses are tailored for each qualification that has non-exam assessment (NEA) units, except for AS Level and Entry Level. They cover the following topics:

- the structure and content of the NEA units
- the assessment objectives and marking criteria for the NEA units
- examples of student work with commentary and feedback for the NEA units
- interactive marking practice and feedback for the NEA units.

We are also developing courses for some of the examined units, which will be available soon.

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