



Advice for students and teachers on fieldwork and the NEA in 2022

Ofqual has decided to carry forward the arrangements that were put in place for 2021 to 2022 for AS/A level Geography.

At A level, the non-exam assessment will be retained and some primary data collection should be included in the students' investigations, but exam boards should be flexible in their requirements for students to use primary data.

It is acceptable for primary data to be collected without "going into the field", and students can make use of technology to collect data by remote means. In this context, the "field" can include desk-based studies if there is an element of primary data collection.

A balance between primary and secondary data has not been defined for past cohorts and this remains the same for 2022. Primary data will still form a part of the investigation. However, the proportion is not generally stated in the mark schemes of the awarding organisations, and this may form a smaller fraction of the total data this year.

Students will not be compromised in terms of their performance if they are not able to conduct fieldwork in a more 'traditional' way due to public health issues.

Centres are not required to submit the 2-day fieldwork declaration (GCSE and AS) or the 4-day fieldwork declaration (A level) in 2022. It is not essential for students to visit/study a range of environments (human/physical).

For GCSE and AS geography, the exam boards will not ask questions in written examinations about fieldwork that students have undertaken themselves. However fieldwork questions based on unfamiliar data will be included in the assessment. In the AS exams students will not be required to cover both human and physical geography fieldwork.

At present, the plans for 2023 are to return to "normal" ie the Year 12 students. The term 'greater flexibility' in the use of primary data may be removed. These students are unlikely to have done any fieldwork during their GCSE course.

Schools and colleges should continue to provide fieldwork activities for their students if they are able to do so, including by remote or virtual means. This will support learners' understanding of the fieldwork process and develop skills which are still being assessed. Fieldwork and enquiry skills should continue to be integrated into the programme of study; these experiences could involve data collection remotely and/or the use of virtual fieldwork methods. This is also essential for progression to A Level Geography.

The final choice of title, question or issue being investigated must still be made by the student. Each student should be independently making decisions around their own data collection methodologies although students may work together in collecting primary data if their investigation topics are similar. Secondary data should be sourced individually.

The independent investigation must relate to a topic in the geography specification. Independent means that the student must carry out the enquiry without relying on teachers and other students.

However it is not necessary to work in isolation, or have a unique topic or theme for the investigation.

Small-scale investigations based in the local area continue to offer valid and accessible opportunities for students. The focus of study remains local. Broad or large-scale research 'projects' would not be appropriate.

There is some scope for students to engage in suitable fieldwork within the school grounds, in their homes and within the immediate local environment, although the topics might be more constrained than in a normal year. Much will depend on location of the school or college (rural, urban, coastal, upland etc), but potential exists for a range of activities in all environments and an outcome that is geographically valid and achievable. It may be necessary this year to restrict the potential investigation themes to just one or two environments, given the constraints of covid, loss of curriculum time and a natural reluctance to organise field visits.

There are advantages in carrying out the work locally. The student knows the place and everything going on there. Risk assessment can be carried out for the locations to be visited. There may be access to local people, local communities and local resources. There is a chance to update/revisit the data collected if there is not enough, and this makes time considerations straightforward. It is also likely the study will show more independence because it will be focused on a place the student knows and it won't be based on a 'big group' approach. Most local areas are surprisingly good for a variety of physical and human options.

Now more than ever before the ethical dimension comes into focus, especially in crowded areas, city centres, honeypot sites. The concept of space is now more widely understood. Everyone is aware of the concept of social distancing in various geographically defined spaces-notably enclosed spaces, public spaces, and open spaces. Public behaviour is also being scrutinised more closely in these spaces.

Lockdown has had an impact on our sense of scale. The absence of travel has had the opposite effect of time-space compression that we normally experience. Consequently, we are all becoming more aware of our local place.

The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on assessment in 2022 is uncertain. For Geography A Level the main change is likely to be the way that the NEA is planned and delivered. In 2022 we may see shorter more focused investigation reports. This could be a positive change. There may be a higher proportion of locally- based investigations and a greater emphasis on secondary data and virtual fieldwork, with some studies largely dependent on online surveys for primary data. If schools are restricted in the sites that can be visited there may be a reduced range of themes and titles, although hopefully it would still be possible for some students to individually select their own locations and topics for conducting primary data collection. It could mean more physical geography enquiries where social distancing may not be an issue.

There are plenty of views in favour of fieldwork, some seeing the essential nature of fieldwork in geography, others feeling that it is safer to be outside doing fieldwork, and some recognising the potential for focusing on the local environment. There are major reservations expressed by the RGS and GA about the loss of fieldwork and its implications.

Ofqual's proposals could create the situation where young people applying to study geography at university in Autumn 2022 could have undertaken no fieldwork in Y11, Y12 and Y13. Fieldwork is

integral to a high-quality geography education, and to have students arrive at university without these basic skills is worrying and ultimately harms their employability.

The requirement to take part in four days of fieldwork has strengthened the hand of Geography Departments in negotiating time for students away from the conventional curriculum. It is ironic, as we seem to be returning to near normal classroom teaching, that working outside, a much more Covid-safe option, is proposed to be curtailed. This proposal is harmful to the subject and more importantly those students who sign up to it.

Many teachers have also been strong in supporting the invaluable role of fieldwork in schools and colleges.

“We are keen to complete the NEA, partly because we have already started the process with our students. We have already lost recognition for last two year’s work and it would be unfair to do this a third time”

“Fieldwork is a crucial part of the assessment. It is also the part of the course which students get the most from. It would be far better to make other aspects of content optional.”

“I do think that lockdown may have helped centres appreciate that fieldwork can be local and not have to be based on an organised fieldtrip. Allowing students to develop individual titles in the local area rather than being taken to a destination and given a theme, supports better geography and enables the student to investigate something of interest -possibly resulting in a higher quality investigation”.

The cross- board statement representing all awarding organisation says: “Teachers should try to provide students with the opportunity to engage in fieldwork where possible, whether that is ‘in the field’ and / or virtually, to prepare them for their NEA”.

Certain environments and topics may be less appropriate to study under present circumstances. Any activities that involve interaction with members of the public may be less suitable, especially the use of questionnaires and interviews. Busy high streets, sea fronts and tourist honeypot sites might be used with caution, and it may be more difficult to carry out footfall counts or urban land use surveys in busy areas. This may steer some students towards enquiries where social distancing may not be an issue, or studies taking place close to the school/field study centre, depending on the local environment. Students should be careful when sharing field equipment or working closely together, making sure they follow social distancing procedures. Teachers should be comfortable with their plans and suggestions for activities.

The general guidance for investigations remains the same this year as in previous years. Things to avoid include collecting data in large groups, all based on a single theme, and/or relying on a large database that all students dip into. Titles must not be decided retrospectively ie after the data has been collected in groups. The CRF proposal should be completed and approved before the student embarks on a data collecting programme. Very similar or identical titles may result from discussion or collusion between students. Those with similar aims can collaborate on sampling and data collection and share data, but the work cannot be teacher directed. Students should also avoid producing formulaic work with similar presentation and analytical techniques, outcomes and evaluations. Avoid selecting titles and themes not clearly based on the specification. Students should be encouraged to develop interesting and individual titles, but these must be securely referenced to the specification. For example, fluvial geomorphology studies and Bradshaw model source to mouth river investigations are unsuitable.

It's a highly sensitive issue but some students might want to consider place studies focusing on the implications of covid-to do with changes in transport patterns, walking and cycling instead of public transport, changes in the high street, social distancing, working from home, and use of outdoor space. These themes are relevant to the A Level specifications and could lead to high quality local investigations.

Transport enquiries might consider daily and weekly flows of traffic, patterns of commuting or working from home, or attitudes to walking and cycling rather than public transport

Changes in the high street could focus on short term and long term impacts, circulation space for pedestrians, width of pavements and one-way systems, how outdoor spaces have been adapted, and whether places are still accessible for all groups, including partially sighted people and people with mobility issues. Lockdown restrictions could accelerate an existing trend caused by online retailing, with effects on hospitality and catering businesses as well as the night-time economy

Working from home studies might focus on why some people find it easier to work from home than others, why some cities have a higher proportion of people working from home than others, the extent to which people will continue to work from home now that restrictions have eased, and changes in demand for city centre office space in the future. If people continue to work from home what are the impacts on where people choose to live, with reduced demand for apartments in inner city locations and increased demand for homes in the countryside.

Here are some examples of studies that have used the pandemic as the basis of their fieldwork. The first one compares a rural part of Devon with Brick Lane in London-referring to economic impacts, business closures and changing sense of place.

Title: Urbanised areas have been more susceptible to the economic impacts of COVID-19: a comparison between Woolacombe, Devon and Brick Lane, London

Aims of the Investigation

- To determine which area has experienced the greatest economic impacts, due to Covid-19.
- To determine how investment throughout the pandemic has fluctuated from 2020-2021 in these two locations.
- To assess people's sense of place, when there has been an influx in staycations and partial closure.

Hypotheses

- Brick Lane is likely to have been affected negatively by COVID-19 more than Woolacombe, with a decrease in property prices and a higher percentage of people put onto furlough and/or made unemployed.
- Brick Lane is likely to have experienced a greater increase in business closures, while Woolacombe is likely to have seen an increase in demand for amenities and seasonal staff.
- Woolacombe is likely to have experienced a change in the sense of place, throughout the pandemic, compared to Brick Lane, due to the seasonality of holiday makers.

Another study compares perception of risk of covid in urban and rural areas

Title. Do people feel safer in rural areas in terms of pathogens? A study into the perception of risk of Covid 19 in Central Bristol compared with Congresbury, Somerset

Aims

- To assess the perception of risk of Covid in contrasting locations
- To understand how far the economy and community have been affected in the two locations
- To find out how people have modified their behaviour as a result of the pandemic.

Sub questions

- How do people perceive the risk from covid in different areas?
- What socioeconomic changes have been caused by the pandemic in the two areas?
- How have people adapted their behaviour in the two areas?

Methodology: Primary data

Mapping and annotating of adaptations such as one way systems/social distancing markers to compare the two places. Photographs taken to show changes and adaptations. Questionnaires aimed at different age groups focusing on perceptions of current risks and consequent changes in behaviour.

Secondary data

Details of local rates of infection through the crisis, lockdown arrangements, economic impacts on local businesses, school and college closures in the two areas.

A third investigation considers the impact of Covid and other changes on the High Street

Title: The High Street in Exeter has undergone notable change in the Twenty-First Century.

Aims

- To investigate changes in the CBD in Exeter over the last 5 years.
- To assess the effects of the Princesshay development.
- To assess the immediate impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the high street.

Sub-Hypotheses

- Exeter's CBD (Central Business District) has undergone a decline in the past five years
- The Princesshay development has had a mostly positive impact on the CBD.
- Nationwide lockdown due to the Covid-19 Pandemic has had a negative impact on the high street.

Marking and moderation processes will need to be flexible in expectation about the amount and types of primary data to avoid being seduced by 'proper' primary data. There will be no inbuilt disadvantage where the student relies largely on pertinent secondary data in 2022 as long as there is a reasonable amount of primary data. In this context, the "field" can include desk-based studies where data has been obtained online, provided that there is an element of primary data collection.

There would be a penalty for relying entirely on secondary data. See details on each examination board website. For example one awarding body is likely to restrict marks to Level One in the methodology criterion. There will be no change to the mark schemes. However wording of part of the mark scheme might be interpreted more broadly, specifically where field data, phenomena in the field, field methodologies, field results and field observations are being referred to.

As indicated above, technology is readily available to support investigations at the local level. It may be necessary to conduct primary research using these types of methods this year where students are unable to visit fieldwork sites themselves for health or other reasons.

Online interviews can be done by mobile phone, through a laptop video call, or by text chat. Webcams can be used to collect primary data. For example, pedestrian counts (at different times), footfall counts, environmental quality surveys, traffic counts, changing weather patterns, local place studies, or field sketches.

Google forms can be used to collect basic demographic information and ask open questions.

Microsoft Forms (part of Office365) can be used to set up online questionnaires, opinion polls, and quizzes.

OnlineSurveys.ac.uk can be used to set up online questionnaires targeted towards academic research.

SurveyMonkey is a quick and easy (and free for basic use) online survey tool.

Survey123 can be used to collect primary data on tablets or smart phones.

GIS tools such as ArcGIS are powerful ways of doing virtual fieldtrips. They can also be used to collect and map secondary data, such as physical data, land use, demographic and economic data.

Students can use street view in Google Maps to measure gentrification with a QDI, or record land use along an urban transect.

A free digital survey tool such as Survey Monkey or Smart Survey, or a video conferencing tool such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, can be used to avoid face-to-face meetings.

Google Street View can be used to compare the current street scene to a recent historic date (i.e. pre Covid-19). If there is reluctance to go into the field the student could use Street View instead of an actual visit.

General advice to students when completing the NEA

- Choose a tightly focused fieldwork question
- Have a strictly limited number of hypotheses or sub questions
- Ensure that the proposed work has a strong spatial component.
- Have very clear and specific links to research
- Investigate a small well-defined area
- Justify in detail all the methods used, linked to the hypotheses, and explain the sampling methods employed.
- Have large sampling size for statistical analysis
- Be aware of a wide range of graphical techniques and suitable statistical tools available for data analysis.
- Make use of geolocated data, using GIS (ArcGIS, collector app, what3words etc)
- Focus on interpreting and not just describing results-explain findings, highlighting spatial patterns and trends.
- Embed all illustrations within the text, and refer to them in the written analysis.
- Provide sustained evidence of thinking critically about the entire research process, including the broader geographical context.

Fieldwork is still an essential aspect of geographical education and of all qualifications at both A Level and GCSE. Ideally teachers should embed fieldwork within any programme of study that they create, although it is appreciated that there have been significant challenges over the past two years. At GCSE there will still be “unfamiliar” fieldwork questions based on realistic fieldwork

scenarios, where students are required to respond to field data and apply knowledge and understanding to the information provided. Students should therefore consolidate and extend their understanding of geographical concepts learned in the classroom by engaging with enquiries conducted outside of the classroom and school grounds. Furthermore, they should be challenged to apply what they have learned through specific fieldwork in local contexts to the wider context of geography.

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