

Geography

GCSE, AS and A-level

Summer 2021 exam changes and support

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Following JCQ's guidance on putting together a range of evidence for your students and deciding grades, here are some things to consider.

Planning for evidence collation

- Before selecting the evidence, be clear that you'll be grading students on their performance in only the subject content that you have taught, remotely and in the classroom. Students, therefore, don't have to have completed a mandated amount of content or demonstrate skills, knowledge and understanding across every area of the specification as they would normally. This means that they may not have covered all the topics, and this is ok.
 - For example, at GCSE, it may be that they've not studied content for Paper 3 (although if they have, of course, this evidence can be used) and at A-level, the NEA may not be complete. It's unlikely that students will have studied for assessment of familiar fieldwork at GCSE and AS level, which was removed for 2021 exams.
- Whilst there's no set requirement for the minimum amount of content that students must have been taught, heads of centres will be required to confirm that students have been taught sufficient content to form the basis for a grade.
 - The process set out in the JCQ guidance has been designed to offer maximum flexibility to those who best understand the experience of their students over the last year.
 - With that in mind, we fully expect the approach taken to vary across schools, especially as we know geography teachers take a variety of routes through the specification content – the important thing is that everyone understands the principles with regards to evidence selection and the holistic approach to assigning grades.
- There's no requirement that evidence must draw on the Assessment Objectives (AOs) according to their normal weightings for GCSE, AS, and A-level (these are outlined in the specification documents). However, given their importance for understanding student performance, we'd advise that you include an assessment of as many AOs as possible.
- You'll only be able to assign a grade to students based on their demonstrated knowledge and skills, and so any evidence you select must be based on performance and not make assumptions about their potential. For example, if a particular student has a strength or weakness in a unit not taught and therefore not being assessed, you shouldn't consider how that might affect their grade.
- As far as possible, the sources of evidence should be consistent across a class or cohort of students, and schools and colleges should record the reasons for their selection. It's up to your

school or college to make the final judgement about what is to be included, and a rationale is required for any instances where consistent evidence isn't used for a whole class/cohort.

- In the next section, we'll detail some examples of evidence you could use. Consider how these different sources might correspond with the content you have taught students.
 - You can use evidence from earlier in the school year, providing you're confident that it reflects the student's own work. For example, students might have completed an 'end of unit test' on a particular topic under exam conditions at school – this would be useful evidence and it wouldn't always be necessary to assess this area of the specification again. Bear in mind that your approach to this will be very dependent on the circumstances of your school and students - more recent evidence is likely to be more representative of students' performance, although there might be exceptions.
 - You might find you have 'gaps' in your evidence, where you have taught content but students haven't yet been assessed. Every aspect of the specification doesn't need to be assessed to arrive at a grade. The aim is to include evidence that assesses the student's ability across a reasonable range of subject content reflecting, where possible, all assessment objectives, as set out in qualification specifications. Consider whether the evidence available is sufficient to support the judgement that is being made. If not, what additional assessment might be needed?

Sources of evidence

You'll need to assess what evidence you have available and what further evidence might be required. Here are some ideas for sources that you may choose to build your range of evidence from:

- Mocks – whilst many schools have completed these, some haven't been able to. This is a good example of why this process needs to give schools maximum flexibility.
- Other assessments taken by students through the year – these might be shorter assessments based on a few questions. For eg an 'end of unit' test in the classroom, remotely or as homework.
- Assessment materials provided by AQA:
 - the assessment materials (<https://www.aqa.org.uk/2021-exam-changes/about-our-assessment-and-support-materials>) provided for 2021 are based on questions on past papers and these are completely optional and carry no more weight than any other evidence.
 - They're there to be used in whatever way schools see fit – this means potentially mixing and matching questions, cutting out sections, adding questions in or not using them at all.

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- the benefit of these assessment materials is that there are accompanying answers exemplified with commentary from our lead examiners about how the mark schemes are applied, which could be useful in some scenarios.
 - however, it might be that the questions we've included don't match with the content you're assessing and selecting your own questions from past papers is a better approach.
 - There may be assessment materials from alternative qualifications that could be adapted to be useful eg from our Oxford AQA GCSE and AS/A-level Geography specifications (<https://oxfordaqaexams.org.uk/subjects/geography/>)
 - Tasks devised by you that reflect the specification, that follow the same style as our exams and can be marked in a way that reflects our mark schemes.
 - Tasks from textbooks or other publishers that link closely with our assessment characteristics.

In weighing up different evidence that was produced at different times and in different contexts, you may want to consider the following:

- how confident are you that it's the student's own work? You'll have more confidence in your judgement if you're sure the work is authentic.
- what was the level of control; was it taken in timed conditions? Was it supervised? Was there an opportunity for redrafting?

Any work produced by students after the JCQ guidance was published (24 March 2021) should be retained where it has been used as part of the evidence to support grades. If student work was completed before this guidance was published, and is no longer available, appropriate records should be included as evidence instead. For example, where mock exam scripts were returned to students for feedback, a copy of the mock exam paper and the grade boundaries used should be included alongside a record of the mark a student achieved.

Taking a holistic approach to assigning grades

You've got until **18 June** to submit your students' grades. These should represent a holistic, objective judgement based on the available evidence that you've collected. There are a few things to consider which may help you to weigh the different evidence that you have in coming to a judgement about your students' grades:

- This is a very different approach to awarding grades usually, where ultimately the number of marks a student achieves is the determinant for the grade they're awarded. This year, teachers will need to assess the quality of students work and consider this against the qualitative characteristics of the grade descriptors and accompanying exemplification. Emphasis must be on this holistic approach and not on individual marks or particular grade boundaries.

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- Grades should be based on the students' performance, not their potential. You can only assign a grade based on the evidence you're submitting, not how you think the student should have performed if the exams had gone ahead. This means you shouldn't attempt to factor in how missed components or specification content may have affected their grades. For eg this could be missed content that you know your students tend to do better or worse with eg pre-release content, fieldwork questions or the NEA. The same applies to the use of using trajectories – only the students demonstrated knowledge and understanding should be used to assign a grade.
 - Consider the JCQ grade descriptors (<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/JCQ-Guidance-on-the-Determination-of-Grades-for-A-AS-Levels-and-GCSEs-Summer-2021.pdf>) for each qualification and the exemplars provided for each of the grades, which have been produced to underpin the centre's holistic grading judgements.
 - Grades should be objective and there's guidance from the government about how that should be achieved - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/information-for-centres-about-making-objective-judgements/information-for-centres-about-making-objective-judgements>

The NEA at A-level

- When exams were cancelled earlier this year, the advice from JCQ was to continue with NEA where possible. That being said, the usual deadlines and moderation by exam boards won't be applicable this year.
- The weighting of the NEA should be considered if possible – a complete NEA would usually contribute to 20% of the grade and this should be considered in the context of other suitable assessment evidence.
- Where the NEA is complete, or partially complete, teachers should use this as evidence to support student grades. There's more detail below about using incomplete NEA as evidence.
- Where NEA was not started, and if it is not possible to complete any part of it before the process of grade awarding begins, teachers need not use the NEA when deciding grades. The JCQ guidance says that students shouldn't be penalised if they had been unable to complete their NEA due to circumstances beyond their control caused by the pandemic. The evidence used to make judgements must only include the appropriate assessment of the content that has been taught.
- Very importantly, if students are missing or have an incomplete NEA, you shouldn't attempt to predict an outcome or award a mark according to the student's potential. This is because grades will be based on teachers' assessments of the standard at which students are performing and will be based on the student's demonstrated knowledge and skills – not their potential knowledge and skills.

NEA – Partially complete NEA

- Partially completed NEA can be used as evidence when awarding students with a grade. Teachers will need to judge whether or not there's sufficient work to be used as evidence.
- It's important to judge only the work students have produced, not what you expect they may have achieved should they have completed the NEA.
- There may be other work you can use as supplementary evidence of student performance for elements of the NEA that are incomplete. This work would need to demonstrate similar skills, knowledge and understanding as required by the NEA marking criteria (which is largely AO3).
- You can mark partially completed NEA using the marking criteria ([page 32-39 of the specification](#)). The marking criteria are broadly divided into sections usually reflected in students' NEA. This means that if they've completed their introduction and methodology, you should be able to apply these parts of the mark scheme in full. Where there are elements of the mark scheme that aren't applicable, don't use them eg if students have written up their methods, but not carried them out, it would be impossible to consider strand '2c' of the 'Methods of field investigation' area: *To implement chosen methodologies to collect data/information of good quality and relevant to the topic under investigation (AO3)*. In this case or a similar scenario, you can remove the marks attached to this strand or area and assess the NEA out of fewer marks. It may not always be this straight forward, depending on what areas of the NEA students have completed, and you'll need to decide how to approach that.
- You can use the partial NEA as evidence, as you would other assessments, to take a holistic view of the student's performance. Judgement of these assessments should be made by considering how any evidence meets the qualitative characteristics of the grade descriptors (and accompanying exemplification materials).

Relevant resources

GCSE

- GCSE specification
<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/geography/gcse/geography-8035>
- JCQ GCSE descriptors
<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Summer-2021-Grade-Descriptors-GCSE.pdf>
- GCSE 2018 exam papers and mark schemes
<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/geography/gcse/geography-8035/assessment-resources?f.Exam+Series%7CW=June+2018>
- GCSE sample assessment materials
<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/geography/gcse/geography-8035/assessment-resources?f.Exam+Series%7CW=Sample+set+1>

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- On-demand course: GCSE Geography: Mark scheme guidance and application
https://www.aqa.org.uk/professional-development/course-details?meta_E=GEOGOE1x

AS and A-level

- AS specification
<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/geography/as-and-a-level/geography-7036>
- A-level specification
<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/geography/as-and-a-level/geography-7037>
- JCQ AS/A-level grade descriptors
<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Summer-2021-Grade-Descriptors-A-AS-Levels.pdf>
- AS 2017 and 2017 exam papers and mark schemes
<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/geography/as-and-a-level/geography-7036/assessment-resources?f.Exam+Series%7CW=June+2017&f.Exam+Series%7CW=June+2018>
- AS sample assessment materials
<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/geography/as-and-a-level/geography-7036/assessment-resources?f.Exam+Series%7CW=Sample+set+1>
- A-level 2018 exam papers and mark schemes
<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/geography/as-and-a-level/geography-7037/assessment-resources?f.Exam+Series%7CW=June+2018&f.Component%7C7=Paper+2&f.Component%7C7=Paper+1>
- A-level sample assessment materials
<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/geography/as-and-a-level/geography-7037/assessment-resources?f.Exam+Series%7CW=Sample+set+1&f.Component%7C7=Paper+2&f.Component%7C7=Paper+1>
- NEA exemplars
<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/geography/as-and-a-level/geography-7037/assessment-resources?f.Resource+type%7C6=NEA+tasks>

Available on Centre Services (or e-AQA if you're not yet registered for Centre Services)

- For all qualifications, exam papers and mark schemes from 2019 and 2020 are available, as well as additional sample assessment materials.
- T-OLS (Teacher Online Standardisation) for A-level NEA
- 2021 assessment materials for all geography qualifications, including mark schemes and exemplar answers with commentary
- Grading exemplification for all geography qualifications – examples of marked student work at different grades, with commentaries.