

A Level Geography (2016)

Independent Investigation & Written Report

Non-Examination Assessment (NEA)

Frequently Asked Questions



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Contents

- Section A – The Independent Investigation Proposal Form p2
- Section B – Undertaking data collection for the Independent Investigation p4
- Section C – Writing up the Independent Investigation p6
- Section D – Admin queries p9
- Appendix – Further information p11

Section A – The Independent Investigation Proposal Form

1. Can an investigation be based on any topic in the specification, even if it has not been taught?

Students can base their investigation on any topic in the specification, but investigation titles must be derived from the specification content. On the Independent Investigation Proposal Form, students need to clearly show how their title derives from the specification. This is an opportunity for the students to demonstrate their independence, especially where students' titles are similar.

2. Can more than one topic / theme from the specification be chosen as the focus?

One title should be chosen as the basis of the Independent Investigation but this title can be drawn from more than one area of the specification.

3. Does the Independent Investigation need to be physical or human?

The Independent Investigation could be based on either physical or human geography. Alternatively, students could choose to do investigations with a people–environment theme. The key point is that there should be a clear link to the specification and it therefore does not matter which aspect students choose. Teachers need to ensure that students have participated in physical and human fieldwork; however, this should not pre-determine students' choice of Independent Investigation.

4. How different do the titles have to be across the same group of students?

Students must devise their title independently; failure to do so would constitute malpractice. Teachers and students must declare that the requirements of the Independent Investigation have been followed, and this includes that investigation titles are devised independently. This is an opportunity for students to explore in depth an area of geography which interests them; independence enables students open access to the entire specification, which should mean that similar titles are unlikely.

5. What if two students come up with the same title?

If multiple students have the same or similar titles then this is only malpractice if students did not independently come up with their own titles. Inevitably, if students all visit the same environment(s) for fieldwork, there is a possibility of narrowing of titles. This is acceptable as long as students have made decisions about their planned investigation themes and titles independently. If some students independently come up with the same or similar titles, the Independent Investigation Proposal Form and written report provide every opportunity to demonstrate independence.

6. How much guidance can I give students on their titles once they have come up with one?

Teachers can give students general guidance on their titles; please see individual specifications for specific wording on this. Teachers should encourage students to develop one (or more if appropriate) statement, question or hypothesis that can be tested. This may form the actual investigation title or the sub-question or sub-hypothesis. It is critical that teachers take students through the marking criteria at an early stage in their planning so that students are aware of the characteristics of the top levels and can plan an investigation that has the scope to demonstrate these characteristics. Teachers should ensure that students are given the opportunity to make amendments to their titles following discussions, without the teacher rewording them.

The key point here is for students to decide what they want to research and how it is best to do that (i.e. through a question, statement or aim) and then, where relevant, break their main title down into sub-enquiry questions, hypotheses etc. The exemplar Independent Investigation Proposal Forms outline and give advice on levels of teacher guidance around students' titles.

7. How much data needs to be collected?

The amount of data to be collected is very much dependent on the student's investigation. If students have a good understanding of their chosen topic, this will help them identify the types of data they need to collect to complete their investigation. It is important for students to be clear on what they want to find out and how they will potentially do this through their data collection. Students need to understand the differences between primary, secondary, qualitative and quantitative data, and what value these bring to an investigation. In choosing their data collection techniques at the planning stages of their investigation, students should be able to explain why they have chosen them, what they hope the data will show and how this will support them later in their analysis.

8. Do students need to have quantitative and qualitative data?

All of the Awarding Organisations state that qualitative and / or quantitative data are required, as appropriate / justifiable to the student's Independent Investigation.

9. How much guidance can I give on analytical techniques?

A range of analytical techniques (including their strengths and weaknesses) could be taught at any stage during the AS / A Level course. The techniques should not be taught to individual students specifically for their own investigations. As part of the planning stage, students should consider the types of data to be collected and the subsequent presentation and analysis of this data, although it is recognised that techniques might change as the investigation evolves.

Section B – Undertaking data collection for the Independent Investigation

1. How many days of fieldwork do students need to complete for their Independent Investigation (NEA)?

There is no stipulation regarding the amount of time that students must spend completing fieldwork for their Independent Investigation. There is, however, a requirement that students complete four days of fieldwork during their A Level course; this is a minimum requirement, and further fieldwork days can be undertaken and are encouraged. It is up to schools and colleges to decide what approach will work best for them and their students based on their individual circumstances. With regard to the Independent Investigation, teachers need to ensure that students have enough time to complete the primary data collection, as set out in their methodology on the Independent Investigation Proposal Form.

2. Can a student collect primary data for their individual investigation separately from the fieldwork organised by the centre?

There is no regulation that precludes students from collecting all or some primary data outside the confines of a centre-organised fieldwork opportunity. However, teachers should ensure that the time spent in the field can be confidently authenticated. Schools and colleges will also need to consider the health and safety implications of allowing students to collect data in these circumstances.

3. Can students use data they collected previously, e.g. on an AS fieldwork trip, as the primary data for their individual investigation? Can students use data collected by a previous cohort as their secondary data?

Students should **only** collect primary data once they have designed their investigation and completed the Independent Investigation Proposal Form; they cannot use data that they have collected previously as the primary data for their own investigation. Students can use data that

they or another cohort collected previously as secondary data if they **independently** arrive at the decision to do so and, where relevant, approach their teacher to request access to this data. Students should reference the use of this data in their written report as they would with any other secondary data they have **independently** sourced.

4. Are students allowed to carry out a practice investigation?

Students are allowed to practise elements of an investigation. For example, students could use a prior fieldwork opportunity to plan an investigation, practise fieldwork techniques and complete an evaluation etc. However, for the Independent Investigation, students should conduct all the elements of an investigation entirely anew. Any attempt to treat a practice investigation as a 'draft' of the student's non-exam assessment would be considered to be malpractice.

5. To what extent can students work collaboratively when completing their Independent Investigations?

Students can work collaboratively when exploring the initial focus of their investigations. They can work collaboratively to explore a range of generic fieldwork, data collection and sampling techniques, and individually reflect on whether these might be suitable for their own Independent Investigation. Teachers must **not** provide **specific guidance** to students based on any initial investigation ideas. Students must then work independently to finalise their titles and hypotheses / questions / sub-questions / aims for their investigation.

When approving a student's proposal, teachers can give **general guidance** to prompt the student to consider why particular techniques for data collection / sampling have been chosen and what they want / expect to find out. This is important as candidates must be able to fully justify their methodology and sampling strategies in their written report in order to access the full range of marks.

Once students have independently devised their investigation and their Proposal Forms have been approved, the teacher can suggest that they collaborate to collect primary data; this can be done (in small groups) with others who have a similar investigation focus. Differentiation comes from the ways in which students analyse and evaluate the data they have collected, and this will stem from them having independently developed their own titles and their own focus.

Although students can collaborate when collecting data, this is not a requirement and they can work individually if the teacher is assured that there are no health and safety concerns. In addition, if students have collaborated when collecting initial primary data, this does not prevent them from gathering additional data pertinent to their own investigation. Teachers should make students aware that they must organise their own data collection so that there is evidence of their own work in their investigation.

Students must work independently to complete the remainder of their investigation, e.g. presentation and analysis of data, evaluation and drawing conclusions. Students **must not** collaborate on any aspect of their written report; students and teachers will be required to sign the Candidate Record Form to declare that the work is the student's own.

6. What assistance can teachers give to students when completing their Independent Investigations?

Teachers can provide students with **general guidance**; for example, facilitating discussions about potential themes from the specification, broadly outlining the stages of the investigation, and detailing the expectations of the mark scheme. Teachers should **not** provide students with any **specific guidance** at any stage of their investigations; specific guidance is outlined in each Awarding Organisation specification, in addition to the exemplar Independent Investigation Proposal Forms.

It is imperative, however, that teachers ensure all students are able to conduct their investigations in a safe and appropriate manner; therefore a suitable risk assessment should occur and any ethical considerations should be accounted for prior to the student embarking on fieldwork. Teachers may provide students with any relevant detail as part of the risk assessment. For the ethical considerations teachers should provide students with any relevant details to protect students, participants and anyone else involved in the data collection.

Section C – Writing up the Independent Investigation

1. How long can students spend writing up their investigation?

There is no limit to how long students can spend conducting and writing up their investigation. The written report will need to be handed in by the student in time for the teacher to mark it, undertake internal standardisation, and submit the final marks to the Awarding Organisation (see page 10).

Teachers should carefully consider the time required to mark the entire cohort's written reports, as well as to standardise marking across the cohort. At the beginning of the course, students should be provided with clear deadlines for the Independent Investigation Proposal Form and the written report.

2. How should the Independent Investigation written report be structured?

For those studying the Eduqas specification, it is a requirement that written reports are structured under the headings set out on page 38 of the specification. For those studying the AQA, Edexcel and OCR specifications, there is no requirement for a particular structure.

Teachers may want to advise students to structure their written work in accordance with the mark scheme provided within each Awarding Organisation's specification, as this may facilitate the marking and standardisation of students' work. The mark schemes are aligned with the process of geographical enquiry detailed in the [DfE GCE AS and A level subject content for geography](#).

3. As a teacher am I allowed to produce a student guide or template?

Teachers must not provide detailed, specific guidance to enable students to write up their own particular investigations. As such any guide or template must be generic; i.e. suggestions of fieldwork methods, data presentation techniques, statistical tests, etc. should not relate specifically to an individual student's investigation. A teacher's advice and guidance document should enable students to take the initiative in writing up their investigation. **If a teacher does provide a template this constitutes malpractice.**

The generic and specific guidance permitted at different stages of the investigation are detailed within each Awarding Organisation's specification:

Awarding Organisation	Guidance permitted at different stages of the Independent Investigation
AQA	pp30–32
Edexcel	pp70–71
Eduqas	pp62–65
OCR	pp74–79

4. Should all raw data used in the investigation be provided in the written report?

It is not a requirement to include all raw data in the written report. The data provided in the written report should be selected appropriately to allow for analysis, conclusions and evaluations to be made.

The data can be located in the main body of the written report or in the appendices. It is also recommended that examples of data recording sheets are included in the appendices.

5. What data presentation techniques are appropriate?

Data presentation techniques should be appropriate to the investigation taking place and the data being collected, and should allow for sufficient analysis, conclusions and evaluations to be made. There are no set requirements for the type, number and complexity of the presentation and analytical techniques ultimately chosen by the student. Students are advised to consider the data presentation techniques together with the analytical techniques that might be used.

The geographical skills required at A Level provide further guidance, and teachers should also read the relevant section of the Independent Investigation mark scheme:

Awarding Organisation	Geographical skills	Mark scheme
AQA	pp40–41	pp32–39
Edexcel	pp91–92	pp101–107
Eduqas	pp49–50	pp69–70
OCR	p48	pp59–64

6. Do students need to demonstrate use of statistical analysis?

Statistical analysis may not be appropriate to every investigation. Where relevant, statistical analysis could be included; for example, with measures of central tendency (mean, median and mode), relationship (lines of best fit, anomalies, Spearman's rank), difference (t-tests, Mann Whitney), association (Chi-squared) and coding. Please see the individual mark schemes of each Awarding Organisation for further guidance (see page 7).

7. Is there a word count?

There is a recommended word count of 3000–4000 words. Students will not be penalised on the basis of the length of their written report. However, excessively high or low word counts may restrict students' ability to access the marking criteria. Students are advised to declare the word count on the front cover of the written report to facilitate marking and standardisation.

8. What format should be used for the written work?

There is no specific requirement as to how the written report should be formatted. Students can type up their work using Microsoft Word or a similar word processing program, but alternative programs could also be used such as those used for presentation, e.g. Microsoft PowerPoint, as long as the assessment requirements can be met. Work can be handwritten but this is not advised due to the increased difficulty of editing, formatting, data presentation, etc.

The formatting guidelines below are only advisory (except for those specifically relating to Eduqas) and represent the formatting guidelines of many Higher Education institutions:

Formatting Recommendations

- Use A4 page size
- Choose line spacing that aids readability [Eduqas = 1.5 line spacing]
- Use Arial, Times New Roman, Verdana, Candara or Calibri Fonts (11–12 point) or similar academic/professional fonts [Eduqas = 11 point font]
- Use page numbers
- Use spell/grammar check
- Include word count on the front cover page
- Include the following in a header or footer:
 - 5-digit centre number
 - Candidate number
 - Component code
- Abbreviations (acronyms) can be used if they are in common use and are meaningful to the reader. They should be explained in the first instance, e.g. 'HDI (Human Development Index)'.
- Tables and figures, in general, should be comprehensible without reference to the text, i.e. labelled and numbered, followed by a short description of the contents.

NB: If handwriting, a student's writing should be legible and black ink is recommended.

9. Are references, footnotes, etc. required?

The written work must acknowledge anything that is not the student's original thoughts, ideas or words. If this is not the case, the student could be accused of plagiarism. To facilitate this, students should keep a detailed record of their own research, planning, resources, etc.

It is recommended that the Harvard system of referencing is used. An Imperial College London guide to Harvard Referencing can be found here: <http://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/library/public/harvard.pdf>

Written work must include references where appropriate, either as a bibliography or reference list at the end of the written work (footnotes can also be used). It is expected that, in conducting the Independent Investigation, students will have read and gathered information from a range of sources; these might include books, journals, reports, newspapers and material from the internet, as well as ideas generated in classroom discussion.

Section D – Admin queries

1. What paperwork needs to be completed?

Please see your specification for details of required paperwork. All relevant paperwork must be kept on file until the deadline for an enquiry about results (EARs) has passed or until any appeal, malpractice or other results enquiry has been completed, whichever is later.

Guidelines on administration are provided annually by JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications); the most recent can be found here: [JCQ instructions for conducting Non-Examined Assessments 2016-2017](#).

2. Are there rules about how we store the investigations during the writing process and after completion?

Work does not need to be stored securely during the writing process. However, students should be reminded that they need to work independently during the writing process. JCQ guidelines state that "the work you submit for assessment must be your own", and "you must not copy from someone else or allow another candidate to copy from you".

Internally assessed work that is not required for moderation purposes and work returned to centres after moderation **must** be stored securely until all possible post-results services have been exhausted.

3. We realise that we don't have to submit drafts but can teachers pre-mark drafts of the non-exam assessment?

The teacher is not permitted to mark any written draft and return it to the student to be revised. Any draft written work should be for the student's own use only.

4. If more than one teacher is marking work are we expected to show internal standardisation, and to indicate that this has happened?

If more than one teacher is marking students' written work across the cohort then the students' marks should be internally standardised. It is important that all teachers involved mark to a common standard; page 17 of the JCQ guidelines for conducting non-examination assessment contain specific examples of good standardisation practice. You can find the document here: [JCQ instructions for conducting Non-Examined Assessments 2016-2017](#).

Teachers should retain evidence that internal standardisation has taken place. Consult your specification for further details.

5. a) What is the submission date for the non-exam assessment? What exactly do we need to submit and can it be submitted electronically?

b) Can centres be granted submission extensions for marks and / or written investigations under special circumstances?

a) OCR, AQA and Edexcel require electronic submission of marks by 15th May. The deadline for Eduqas will be 23rd March in each exam series. Please consult your specification and / or Awarding Organisation website for further details.

Written reports requested for external moderation should usually be printed and sent as a paper copy to the Awarding Organisation unless you have checked in advance with your Awarding Organisation with regard to submitting electronic copies. Please note the following specific points:

- AQA states "Students are expected to submit a written report..."
- Edexcel states "the report must be printed"
- Eduqas states "the report must be word processed"
- OCR requires "Moderation via the OCR repository (electronic copies of the work) or postal moderation (post the printed sample of the work to the moderator)".

Section 4.7 (page 12) of [the JCQ instructions for conducting Non-Examined Assessments 2016-2017](#) provides further guidance on the presentation of work.

b) If your centre has been affected by circumstances that are beyond its control, it may be possible in exceptional cases to grant a short extension to the submission date. Please see Section 6.4 of [the JCQ instructions for conducting Non-Examined Assessments 2016-2017](#). Extensions are granted solely at the discretion of the Awarding Organisation concerned and centres should contact the Awarding Organisation without delay if such circumstances arise.

6. How extensive do teachers' comments need to be on (a) the Independent Investigation Proposal Form, and (b) the section where we note the overall mark?

a) On the Independent Investigation Proposal Form, teachers can provide oral and written advice at a **general** level. Teachers must not provide a title or give specific guidance about how to improve

the work in order to meet the assessment criteria. The Exemplar Independent Investigation Proposal Forms produced jointly by the Awarding Bodies show examples of general and specific guidance. General advice of this nature does not need to be recorded or taken into account when the work is marked. Any assistance which goes beyond general advice must be recorded and taken into account when the work is marked.

b) Teachers are responsible for marking work in line with the marking criteria detailed in your Awarding Organisation's specification. Teacher annotation should be used to provide evidence of **how** and **why** marks have been awarded. Use phrasing from the mark scheme to indicate clearly to the moderator how the student has met the assessment criteria; this will facilitate both the standardisation process within the centre and external moderation of the work. It is important to remember that annotations should be used to explain how marks were awarded in the context of any additional assistance given to the student.

7. Once we have marked the written report, can we discuss these marks with the students?

Students should be advised of their marks within a sufficient window in order to allow time for any internal appeal (within centres) to be concluded **prior to** the submission of centre marks to the Awarding Organisation. The teacher must make it clear that marks are subject to change through the external moderation process. See Section 6.1 of [the JCQ instructions for conducting Non-Examined Assessments 2016-2017](#).

8. What happens to students who have special needs and under examination conditions are allowed support?

In principle, if a student has an access arrangement as part of his/her normal way of working within the centre, a similar arrangement will normally be permitted for non-examination assessments. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) **must** ensure that all relevant staff are aware of any access arrangements which need to be applied for non-examination assessments. The JCQ document on access arrangements and special consideration contains detailed guidance: <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration>

Appendix – Further Information

JCQ Exams Office

Non-Examination Assessments webpage: <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/non-examination-assessments>

Documents:

- Advice to centres: <http://www.jcq.org.uk/Download/exams-office/non-examination-assessments/instructions-for-conducting-non-examination-assessments-2016-17>
- Advice to candidates: <http://www.jcq.org.uk/Download/exams-office/information-for-candidates-documents/information-for-candidates-%E2%80%93-non-examination-assessments-2016-2017> – teachers should print out the 2-page PDF for each student.