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# AS LEVEL GEOGRAPHY

7036/2 Human Geography and Geography Fieldwork Investigation  
Report on the Examination

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### **Synopsis and general points**

- This summer marked a return of the first externally assessed sitting of this paper under ‘normal’ conditions after three years because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, changes were made to how AS Geography is assessed for this series.
- Ofqual determination that students should not be assessed on fieldwork that they had undertaken themselves meant that:
  - the two questions usually asking about ‘familiar’ individual fieldwork enquiries were omitted from the 7036/2 paper; these carry 15 marks in total
  - the total marks available on the paper were reduced from 80 to 65
  - the remaining section B questions assessing geographical and fieldwork skills from unfamiliar ‘third party’ fieldwork enquiries were retained.
- Performance levels were wide ranging and overall marks attained were broadly similar to those achieved in 2019.
- With the possible exception of a few items, the paper proved to be generally accessible to students across the ability range.
  - More able students were able to recognise the demands of the challenging questions and responded with well developed and sophisticated answers.
  - Those of moderate ability were also able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, particularly in relation to their studies of the Changing Places topic.
  - Students seemed to use their time effectively and there were very few who failed to complete the paper due to time constraints.
- Students continued to perform better on Section A (Changing Places) than on Section B. Statistics suggest that the gap in performance between the two has widened a little in this series. Reasons for this may include:
  - On a positive note, performance on most of the Changing Places questions in Section A has improved since the 2019 series.
  - Disrupted teaching and learning over the past two years has had a more significant impact on the ability to use and apply geographical skills, especially fieldwork skills, that are assessed in Section B.

### **Assessment objectives**

A notable feature of the marking statistics that mirrors the last bullet point above is the students’ performance on different assessment objectives. Students performed more strongly on AO1 and AO2 assessment (including when mixed) than on AO3 assessment.

Reasons are likely to be similar to those given above but, in addition, it is worth mentioning that:

- disruption to education caused by the pandemic has had a relatively lesser impact on students’ ability to acquire a sound base of knowledge and understanding (AO1).
- evidence from responses suggested that students have had sufficient opportunities to apply their knowledge and understanding (AO2) in assignment work, mock exams etc

Marks awarded for the three different assessment objectives are relatively evenly spread on the paper. The balance was upset a little by the removal of students' own fieldwork questions. The spread was as follows:

*AO1 = 21 marks*

*AO2 = 15 marks*

*AO3 = 29 marks*

## **Section A**

As the Changing Places topic has become more embedded in the AS/A level curriculum, students seem to have found it interesting, easier to relate to and have become more engaged with it. Responses demonstrated that students were more confident when applying the concepts and ideas associated with the topic. They were more familiar with a range of terminology and generally used it more accurately in their responses.

### **Question 1**

**1.1 and 1.2** - These two multiple-choice questions (MCQ) evidently provided a gentle introduction to the exam paper following the 3 year break. Both were tackled comfortably by around 90% of students, which is a much higher percentage than MCQ questions have achieved in the past. It presents further evidence that the knowledge base of the topic has improved.

**1.3** – This question was also handled quite successfully with, on average, students gaining nearly two marks of the three available. It required a focus on the usefulness of oral sources when investigating people's attachment to a place. Inevitably perhaps, most students used 'songs' (suggested by the question) as a reference point to support their responses. Examples, while not essential for the full marks, usually added the support necessary to confirm understanding and when used in this way were usually credited. The only slight negative to report is that a small number of students seemed to lose track of the command word and instead of outlining their usefulness, drifted into 'evaluation' mode, suggesting reasons why oral sources were not useful.

**1.4** – Performance on this question was weaker than expected. The overall mean was just below 50% of the marks available, fairly comparable with both 1.5 and 1.6. The main problem was a focus on attempting to explain change (and/or continuity to a lesser extent), especially inferring socio-economic and demographic change, which could not be determined by map evidence alone. These responses were often compounded by the use of poor map skills. It is acknowledged that grid references were tricky given that there are few of them but, when attempted, even 4 figure grid references used were mostly inaccurate. More reference should have been made to location by direction, relative distance or by association with other named features or areas on the map. The maps were at different scales and a key was not provided for either. Some recognised the map scale difference, but more could have been done to base the analysis around this, which would have been creditworthy. Students generally recognised named features but were clearly less familiar with some map symbols. It was generally felt that AS Geography students could have a greater appreciation and understanding of OS maps than was shown.

**1.5** – The majority of responses to this question were very similar in approach and basic content. Differentiation was enabled by the considerable variation in depth, level of development and the support and detail provided to substantiate arguments. The regular format often involved defining and explaining qualitative data and insider perspectives. The two ideas were then linked by suggesting why qualitative sources (even quantifiable surveys) are good at portraying insider perspectives. Almost invariably, quantitative data was brought into the assessment as an alternative way of representing insider perspectives. Specific examples of quantitative sources such as census or IMD data were often used to support the argument that these could also represent insider perspective. Often this meant straying into more general representation of place (or place characteristics) but was usually brought back to make the link with insider perspectives. There was inevitably mention of opinion, bias and whether data was truly representative for both qualitative and quantitative sides of the discussion. Most responses provided a clear conclusion. The majority came to a similar conclusion that qualitative data was better but not the only way to represent insider perspective and that quantitative had some role to play. Consequently, there was a reasonable balance of AO1 and AO2 credit awarded for many responses. The majority of answers were sound and managed to offer some clarity and achieve at least Level 2 credit. Approximately 70% of students received Level 2 credit; some responses were particularly good with nearly 15% achieving a Level 3 mark.

Although there was no requirement to use examples of named places in the response, those containing such references were more likely to include the detail necessary to carry the credit into Level 3. It was entirely feasible to use a studied place as the vehicle on which to base a response. Some excellent responses were seen when adopting this approach, particularly when using local place studies and referring to local artists, poets, photographers etc. and comparing their perspectives with census, IMD or other quantitative data.

**1.6** – Unlike question 1.5, a wide range of approaches was adopted when answering this longer essay question. The question demanded that students made a link(s) between two fairly specific concepts: ‘increased connections’ and ‘near and far’ places, and then discuss, and ultimately evaluate, to what extent the former negated the latter. The variety of different responses and approaches seen were mostly appropriate, focused and creditworthy, especially as both concepts were correctly interpreted quite broadly.

The idea of increased connections was explored on a number of fronts, including improved transport technology. The idea of a time – space convergence was commonly referred to in terms of travel time between places being much reduced. Connection types were also examined in terms of media coverage and representation, including social media and the internet as well as flows of people through migration. Underpinning many of these points were ideas associated with globalisation, such as homogenisation, placelessness and varying degrees of place accessibility. Another interesting angle included in some evaluations was that of the affordability of increased connections and hence the statement was partly determined by inequality. These were all perfectly valid lines to follow in the context of the question.

Equally, the near and far places idea was discussed in terms of distance and time travelled and linked to the transport connection mentioned above. However, as well as the ‘physical’ near and far, it was also explored in terms of the emotional attachment to places, which inevitably and legitimately brought in other ideas. These included the notion that near or far could be determined by sense of place or by insider versus outsider perspectives of place.

Putting together combinations of these ideas and linking them, especially if the discussion was reasonably balanced, resulted in some very focused, purposeful, well-supported and engaging essay responses at the top end of marks. Overall, nearly 10% of students achieved Level 4 marks and almost half of students secured a Level 3 mark or above. Like question 1.5, there was no requirement to use examples or named places in the response and it was feasible for non-place supported responses to enter Level 3 comfortably, though those containing references to named places were more likely to include the level of detail necessary for Level 4.

Textbook case studies of named places, such as Detroit, Brick Lane and Stratford were used extensively and occasionally to good effect. However, a focus on place alone generally did not work as well with this question and in weaker responses tended to become a case study 'offload', with little application to the question. Those using more varied, especially local, places as evidence to support each argument tended to offer a more solid foundation for a good response.

A large number of responses were seen scoring at the upper end of Level 2. These tended to be efforts with some focus on the question but were either narrow or imbalanced in their approach and lacking clear development and/or evidence to support. Weaker responses often included those providing a superficial examination of one concept or the other without making the necessary links.

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## Section B

Individual fieldwork was not assessed in this series. As a result of the pandemic, and its associated public health concerns and regulations, students' experience of fieldwork is likely to have varied considerably. This may account for the generally weaker and more inconsistent performance on questions in this section.

### Question 2

**2.1** – This proved to be the most accessible question in section B with around 90% of students securing at least one mark of the two available. Most suggested that the background reading gave a greater insight into the location or area in which their investigation would take place. There were fewer responses that focused on theory or concepts and the idea of developing an aim or hypothesis. As only one reason could be credited, the second mark required a developed point that could be validly linked to the initial reason offered. Reasons relating to identifying health and safety issues and/or producing risk assessments, provided a common way to access both marks.

**2.2** – Students generally found this question more challenging and although around 4 out of 5 students attained at least one mark, only half the students were credited with 2 marks or more for this item. One key issue appeared to be that a significant minority of students were fazed by the idea of what a sampling strategy involved. Another issue that detracted from many responses was answering 'why' the photograph might be used rather than focusing on 'how' it could be used in a more practical sense. Many students drifted into describing features on the photograph or explaining why certain areas would be useful for specific types of human geography fieldwork. Credit was still given for responses that may have, in some way, referred to how data might be collected from areas identified on the photograph, even if a sampling strategy was not covered. The most successful responses required naming a specific strategy (all were considered valid), developing it in more depth by describing and/or explaining how it would be pursued with specific reference to features identified on Figure 2.

**2.3** – As with question 2.2, students found the application of responses to the aerial photograph more challenging. Nearly 10% did not attempt the question (the highest of all the compulsory questions). On many occasions, the photograph was referred to as a map. This was less of an issue as it meant that they recognised that the data had to be presented by location on a spatial backdrop. Of those gaining marks, identifying a relevant piece of data that could be geo-located was less of an issue and credit was given for this. However, the barrier for the majority of students proved again to be the practicality of 'how' this could be presented on the aerial photograph in Figure 2.

### Questions 3 and 4 – Fieldwork investigation optional questions

As the two optional sets of 'unfamiliar' fieldwork questions were designed to mirror each other, they are covered jointly in this report. There was some variation in the graphical information presented in the two options in this paper. This had no real impact on accessibility as average scores for each question (in both options) were very similar. There was a clear preference to opt for question 3 (human based fieldwork) by a ratio of approximately 5 to 1.

**3.1/4.1** – This was very much a ‘hit or miss’ question with nearly 60% of students able, to some extent, to explain the choice of median instead of mean as a measure of central tendency. In both sets of data, students needed to recognise the extreme values in Figures 5 and 11. Outlining this as a basic reason was usually credited with one mark. For the second mark, there needed to be further recognition that these ‘anomalous’ values would skew the mean, making it less representative (as a central measure) of the whole set of the data than the median, that was less affected by the ‘outliers’. This explanation was provided in a variety of ways, all of which were creditworthy.

For question 3.1, students missing the ‘extreme values’ key often suggested that it was because the mean would give a decimal point value rather than a whole integer, provided by the median. This was untenable as the median value for the number of houses sold on the new estate was 7.5. Others were unable to provide an explanation and many simply opted to define each measure.

**3.2/4.2** – Students found this question challenging in a similar way to question 2.2 as it required some practical application, of the data found in Figures 5 and 11, to a definitive presentation method. While more than one suggested method was credited, ‘listing’ different methods was not accepted. At least one method needed to be outlined further by description and explanation. For example, how axes would be used and labelled for each set of data on bar charts and scattergraphs, which were the most commonly chosen methods. Any development along these lines gained further credit. Full marks still had to be reserved for explaining how the chosen method(s) would aid the analysis of the data, which is an essential part of the question. Just over half of students secured 2 or more marks for both 3.2 and 4.2. The issues preventing greater success on this question seemed to be as follows:

- misreading of the question leading to a focus on how the data could be analysed with no presentation method offered
- a lack of development of the initial suggested presentation method and/or link to aid analysis
- in a minority of cases, not really understanding what was meant by presentation methods.

**3.3/4.3** – Evidence from marking this question suggests that many students may not have read and understood all of the stem material comprehensively. The key to answering the question was to refer to the sources of the secondary data, which were provided under Figure 5 and Figure 11. A sizeable minority of students did not refer to these sources in their responses and gave other quite varying reasons why crime data was more reliable than house sale data (or discharge more than rainfall). The majority who did refer to the sources, often simply suggested that police data is more reliable than house sales data (or Environment Agency v. amateur weather enthusiast) without giving clear reasons why. Many did offer either quite vague or generic reasons but the better responses needed to develop their ideas further to explain fully why the source of one set is more reliable than the other.

**3.4/4.4** – Evaluation, especially of ‘unfamiliar’ fieldwork, has always been a challenging notion for students to tackle. In both question 3 and 4, there was a lot of information and data to digest before evaluating the primary data collection. It was hoped that performance on this particular type of question had improved, especially as a number of more detailed and perceptive responses had been seen. However, the overall picture suggests that students still find it difficult to identify clear strengths and weaknesses, with less than 10% of students attaining 6 marks or more. Those students able to see the various elements of the investigation and then ‘picture it as a whole’ by linking the different stages were generally more successful. On the other hand, a large number of responses tended to go through the data in each figure listed in the question and simply describe or at best comment on the



information provided without any clear evaluation of the plan for data collection. Other basic responses were generally supportive of the student's plan in each case without considering any real criticism of some obvious weaknesses. Again, as with the previous question there was some clear evidence that some students had not fully comprehended all the resource material provided. For example, in question 3 in particular, a large number of students understood that the student's survey tool was to be completed by local residents at each site, rather than by the student himself. These slight errors were ignored in the positive marking process but inevitably may have detracted from points made elsewhere in the evaluative response.

It was disappointing to see that the overall marks for the unfamiliar fieldwork aspect of the paper were generally lower than in the 2019 series but perhaps inevitable given the constraints on fieldwork practice over the past two years.

Some suggestions for how students tackle both unfamiliar and their own fieldwork questions include the following:

- For the optional questions, decide beforehand whether to opt for question 3 or 4 to reduce time checking through both sets of resources; the decision could be made on which type of data there is a preference for (human or physical) as the questions will be the same.
- Read through the resource materials for the chosen option carefully and comprehensively; it is time well spent.
- Attempt to identify strengths and weaknesses of the investigation as the resources are being read through; perhaps denoting with an 's' or 'w'; these can be pulled together for evaluation purposes.
- Become more familiar with the different strands of the fieldwork investigation process; see them as stages in building up a full picture, which can then be viewed to consider elements that went well and those that need to be improved.
- A greater understanding and wider appreciation of the skills relating to the strands in the fieldwork enquiry process is something that many students needed to focus on to gain more AO3 credit.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.