

A level Geography - Exams and assessments in 2021

On the 3rd of August Ofqual confirmed their decisions concerning exams and assessments in 2021. For A level Geography, the examination boards were required to make the following changes:

Summary of changes to the A level assessment

1. The requirement for a written statement that centres have given students the opportunity to undertake 4 days of fieldwork is removed.
2. Exam boards to review and confirm their guidance about their expectations relating to primary data for the non-exam assessment.

What does this mean for centres:

- Centres are encouraged to complete as much fieldwork as is possible. This would include fieldwork experiences delivered on or near the school site. Please see the additional document titled 'Fieldwork on your doorstep' within this folder for further guidance on delivering fieldwork on or near to the school site and/or the 'home' place
- Students must still complete the independent investigation and must collect their own primary data
- There have been no changes to the requirements of the mark scheme
- Where students choose to use unmanipulated raw data sets such as meteorological data, this should be supported by other primary data
- Centres should be aware that there is no prescribed balance between primary and secondary data within the independent investigation and that there is flexibility in the way that primary data may be collected. For example, where students cannot collect primary data using more traditional data collection methods 'in the field', they may collect some or all of their primary data via remote means. The following document prepared jointly by the four exam boards and the additional resources within this folder give further guidance for centres on how qualitative and quantitative data may be collected for 2021.

Please note that the submission date for NEA samples for moderation has been extended to **May 15th, 2021**.

Centres should note that no other changes have been made to the content or assessment of the A level specification and that any changes outlined above relate to assessment in 2021 only.

A Level Geography support and guidance for submission 2021

AQA, Pearson Edexcel, Eduqas and OCR have worked together to provide guidance about fieldwork and the Non-examined (NEA) assessment and to highlight support available.

What has changed for 2021?

- Centres do not need to show, or declare to exam boards, that they have given students the opportunity to undertake 4 days of fieldwork.
- There is no requirement to complete both physical and human fieldwork opportunities.
- Exam Boards to provide guidance about primary data for the NEA.

What has stayed the same?

- The NEA has been retained and is still worth 20% of the A Level qualification.
- The marking criteria for the NEA.
- The content in the specifications and the examination of this content.

What does this mean for teachers and students?

- 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.
- Recognition that in making fieldwork accessible, being 'in the field' may include the local area (to the centre / student's home) and school grounds.
- 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.

What do we mean by virtual fieldwork?

- For teachers - 'Opportunity to develop a sense of place remotely using maps, images, data and information without directly visiting that particular place. Geographical enquiry and fieldwork skills can be integrated into the delivery of virtual fieldwork'.
- For students - 'Opportunity to collect data remotely without directly visiting that particular place'.

Supporting teachers and students in understanding the requirements

We are aware of the challenges students may face in designing their methodology and collecting primary data due to health and safety restrictions. To support students with their investigations we want teachers, markers, and moderators to understand the variety of different approaches to collecting primary data.

What has not changed for the NEA?



Students carry out an 'independent' investigation linked to the specification.



Primary and secondary data collection should be included in the students' investigation. Secondary data is strongly advised and is a requirement of some mark schemes. A balance between primary and secondary data has not been defined for past cohorts. This remains the same for 2021.

Primary data is:

Collected at first hand, collected directly by the researcher solely for the purpose of the investigation, and is original and unique.

Secondary data is:

Collected by someone other than the student doing the investigation. It has been collected in the past by someone else (including students) but made available for others to use. It was generally collected for another purpose originally.

An investigation based purely on secondary data has not been appropriate for past cohorts and would not be considered appropriate in 2021.



Students' investigations engage with a place to develop a geographical context (including a physical and / or human environment).



Sufficient data is collected for students to conduct a valid analysis and draw conclusions (NB reference to data can include quantitative and / or qualitative).

For the 2021 submission of NEA, we are still expecting to see primary data form part of their investigation. It is acceptable for primary data to be collected without "going into the field", students can make use of technology to collect data by virtual means. In this context, the "field" can include desk-based studies if there is an element of primary data collection.

Approaches to virtual primary data collection could include:

- Online surveys, interviews or focus groups
- Use of Google Street view and webcams
- Social media platforms to engage with an audience or extract text

NB – this is not an exhaustive list

To support students with their primary data collection, they could use unmanipulated (raw) data such as census, USGS or meteorological data as a source. We would expect this to be used alongside further sources of primary data collected by students.

Like with all other cohorts we would expect to see a variety of primary and secondary data sources used in student's investigations. This enables students to cross reference (triangulate) results, leading to increased validity and reliability in formulating their analysis and conclusions.

What differences might we see in the students' NEAs in 2021?

- How they have collected primary data – there could be more variety and innovation.
- The topics students have chosen to investigate – we may see a wider range chosen.
- Accessibility of fieldwork opportunities – we may see more investigations rooted in the student's local area.
- We may see investigations that include more secondary data than in previous years.

Virtual fieldwork - Free subject community support

Teachers and Students can draw from the expertise that exists in the subject community to deliver and develop fieldwork skills virtually. Some of these resources are outlined below and on the following pages:

The Geographical Association

[Virtual fieldwork](#)

[Geography Education Online](#) (GEO)

The enquiry approach

- [Curriculum planning](#)
- [Questions generator](#)
- [Critical thinking: a model for achievement](#)

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

- [Fieldwork resources](#)
- [Guide to the NEA](#)

ESRI

- [GIS for NEA – beyond the basics for data visualisation with ArcGIS](#)

Further resources

- [Google Education](#) – expeditions