GCSE

GCSE Examiners' Report (New)

Geography

GCSE (New)

Summer 2026

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Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.[1]

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

[1] ***Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.***

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Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner | WJEC

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Executive Summary

This is the first examiners report for the new QFF GCSE Geography course, and it only consists of two sections, for Units 1 and 2 respectively, as after one year of teaching there were around 5100 total entries for Unit 1 and 375 for Unit 2. There were entries for Unit 3, although not enough to make a report necessary, and Unit 4 is not available until May 2027.

There are some key early takeaways for centres to note from Units 1 and 2 however, which will be summarised below and expanded upon further in the report.

Performance in Unit 1, covering the taught content of Our Physical and Human World, was generally positive, considering the candidates were in Year 10 and have less than a year of learning and exam practice behind them. Perhaps due to this, the AO3 questions, which have been (in the legacy specification) and will continue to be the most challenging questions on the paper in this specification, were not done very well overall. Candidates struggled to structure and write their answers in full and in particular found evaluating and giving both sides of an argument very difficult in the higher tariff questions. These appear in Unit 3 as well, so hopefully with practice, candidates will gain confidence at answering these types of question and will fare better on them in the next series when they complete Unit 3 and any Unit 1 re-sit papers. Explain questions were also found to be challenging on this paper, where many candidates described a concept and did not take their answers forward to explain it; the causes of urbanisation in Question 2b being a good example of this. Candidates should also be reminded that annotated diagrams may now be asked for specifically and not as an option in a question (e.g. when describing the formation of coastal stacks and stumps) so these should be practiced at every opportunity and the skill of adding labels to annotate a diagram of a physical feature for example is a key one to learn right from the start of the course. Finally, as has been seen in the legacy Unit 1 paper previously, candidates should be encouraged to carefully use all resources given in the paper to support their answers where possible, and to be specific and accurate when using OS map extracts to answer a question e.g. grid references, use of the key, scale and compass directions.

Performance in Unit 2 must be judged against the low number of entries this year but was encouraging overall with some excellent fieldwork investigations being received. No red flags were raised about investigations from a centre being too similar and there were no reports of any investigations being too long e.g. obviously completed in more than the 7 allotted hours for the 6 tasks. The work was clearly individual to each candidate (and must be like this for all submissions), which was very pleasing to see. A mix of typed, typed and handwritten and purely handwritten reports were received and no problems in using the online submission system were reported. Key areas for improvement based on the 2026 submissions are ensuring enough relevant primary and secondary data is collected and correctly used for Tasks 3a and 3b, ensuring conclusions are clearly linked to the right geographical concepts for Task 5b and most importantly identifying areas to improve and further geographical questions to ask and areas of investigation to study as a key part of the final evaluation.

A much more detailed overview of Unit 2 performance will be given in summer 2027 after all centres have submitted their investigations.

From this Autumn, WJEC will be publishing annually a booklet of annotated exemplars for each of the QFF GCSE Geography Units, showing a range of example questions with strong and weak points and where marks were gained and lost clearly highlighted on each one. This will complement the pre-recorded exam feedback CPD session in October 2026 and will be a much easier and more user-friendly way of finding and using good quality exam questions for classroom practice and revision than the previous Online Exam Review (OER) system that has now been discontinued. Centres are also referred to the new QFF GCSE Geography website (GCSE Geography | Made for Wales) where fieldwork topics and

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guidance documents for all topics up to 2030 are now available, Geog Shot revision documents aimed at each AO and other key parts of the specification can be found and specimen papers & mark schemes, blended learning resources, Unit 2 and 4 NEA handbooks and more are all available to download.

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Unit 1 Our Physical and Human World

Overview of the Unit

The overall performance of candidates in this paper indicates that it was a fair test and at the appropriate standard. Candidates were able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the specification and were able to apply this to unfamiliar contexts when required. There was a balance of short and extended writing questions which were accessible and appropriate, allowing candidates to show their geographical skills and knowledge. All questions were attempted by most candidates (most questions had over 93% attempt rate, with only 4 questions - 1d, 1g, 2f, 3d - below 90%) which indicates the language and phrasing used in the questions, together with the time allowance given, were accessible and appropriate.

As required by the specification, three of the four assessment objectives (AOs) were examined across the paper with each part question assessing a single objective. Some areas where candidates particularly struggled this year include:

- **AO3 questions**: Questions assessing this assessment objective are generally the more challenging questions on the paper, requiring candidates to evaluate, analyse and make decisions. However, it was clear that many candidates did not know how to structure their answer and therefore were unable to access the higher band marks e.g. not providing both points of view in an evaluate question.
- **'Explain' questions**: There were several questions on the paper where candidates were required to explain a concept. For most of these questions the candidates described instead of explained e.g. Q2b asked the candidates to 'Explain the causes of urbanisation' – most candidates were able to describe push and pull factors involved in urbanisation, but few were able to make the link of 'and therefore this led to an expansion of the urban area' for example. Therefore, many candidates were limited to band 1 marks.
- **Q3d**: This question required candidates to explain the link between precipitation and infiltration. It was clear that most candidates knew what both terms were, but few were able to explain how one affected the other. The attempt rate for 3d was 86.6%, the lowest on the paper, the mean mark was 1.1 and the facility factor was 27.7%, suggesting that candidates found this question to be very challenging. The specification states that learners should understand inputs, transfers, stores and outputs in a drainage basin and how water moves through the drainage basin. Therefore, candidates need to understand how each component interacts with other components.

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Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 (b) Candidates were awarded marks based on the quality of their annotation and not on the quality of their diagrams. Most candidates were able to gain some marks for this question, but many left out a 'step' in the process of the type of weathering they were explaining and therefore did not get full marks. For example, the most popular answer was explaining freeze-thaw weathering and most candidates did not include a step which showed that the ice thawed during the daytime.

(e) Candidates were required to describe how weathering and erosional processes lead to the formation of coastal stacks and stumps. Most candidates were able to describe the sequence from crack to stump which was pleasing to see. Many were able to suggest the erosional processes that were involved in this sequence with some suggestion where they might occur which was also good. However few candidates were able to describe the weathering processes involved in this formation and even less able to describe where they located. However, there were some great examples where candidates had included descriptions of biological and salt crystallisation weathering on the roof of the arch which led to its collapse, which was very pleasing to see.

(f) This question was answered very well with most candidates able to interpret an unfamiliar map to identify at least 2 human features that could affect the rate of coastal change. It showed the candidates' confidence in using OS maps which has clearly been practised in schools.

(g) Candidates did not perform very well in this question (mean mark 1.3), and it appeared that they did not read the question fully. Many just described a human activity at the coast but did not go on to explain why it affected coastal change. Those that did attempt the explanation often did not give a full answer - for example groynes stop the movement of sand by longshore drift and therefore slow down the erosion of beaches. Therefore, most candidates gained band 1 marks only.

Q.2 (b) The mean mark or this question was 1.6 and therefore most candidates gained band one marks. It appears that many candidates do not realise what the command word 'explain' requires them to do - they must make the link between a factor which causes a process to happen. Therefore, many candidates were able to list push and pull factors which lead to people moving to urban areas, but few were able to state that because these people were moving into cities, the city had to grow in size to accommodate the new arrivals for example. The few candidates that did gave some great examples of this migration leading to the building of new housing projects/building on greenbelt land etc.

(d) The opportunity to gain full marks in this question were plentiful as there was a range of responses that candidates could provide. However, there were a couple of common mistakes which limited candidates' performance. Firstly, the question asked about how urbanisation had changed over time for the continents shown – many candidates purely talked about countries and therefore did not answer the question. Secondly, they talked about the rate of urbanisation changing but did not say which time period they were talking about and therefore their statement was not creditworthy.

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(e) Candidates responded very well to this knowledge recall question and most candidates were able to gain at least band one marks. However, many responses were placed in band 2 because, although the impacts described were relevant to their chosen city, explanations were often generic and lacked specific detail linked to the case study. The most commonly used examples were Mumbai, London, Cardiff and Lagos. A minority of candidates provided some very specific details (mainly for Mumbai or Lagos) which was great to see.

(f) Most candidates did not read the question properly and therefore only received band 1 marks mainly due to two reasons. Firstly, the question was focused on responses to problems in global cities, however many candidates just described the problems that global cities experienced (repeating their answer to the previous question). Secondly, if candidates did talk about responses their answer was descriptive and rarely evaluative. The question demanded that candidates discuss the positives and negatives of the response whereas most candidates that did attempt to evaluate only provided the positives of the response.

Q.3 (d) Many candidates struggled with this question because they did not have the subject knowledge of how factors of the drainage basin interrelate to each other, and due to the command word, as similarly to Q2b, most candidates described rather than explained.

(e) Most candidates were able to gain some marks for describing what would happen in the drainage basin if forested areas were removed. However, the question directs the candidates that they 'must refer to the map' which many candidates ignored. For those that did refer to what they were trying to show us, some candidates included a random grid reference or name of a location but did not relate this to either a forested area or a settlement that might be flooded.

(g) Candidates responded to this question quite well and many were able to identify either the rocky outcrop or very close contour lines which indicated a steep drop. This illustrated good interpretation of the map.

(h) Most candidates were able to identify at least one feature from the map/photograph as to why Pistyll Rhaeadr was a popular tourist attraction, but few were able to explain why that feature illustrated it was a tourist attraction e.g. many candidates would say that there was a car park there, but few explained that a car park being present showed the popularity of the waterfall/meant that people had somewhere to park their car so they could enjoy the waterfall. The connection was often missing.

(i) Most candidates answered the 'to what extent' part of this question, which was great, but the majority only provided the side of the argument that they agreed with – if they agreed with the statement then they only provided information as to why they agreed and not a balanced answer with the points they disagreed with as well.

Q.4 (c) Some candidates understood that this question was looking for the barriers to entering a country regularly, however most candidates talked about push factors from the countries that people were leaving and were therefore incorrect.

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(d) Most candidates made good use of the resources provided for this question, however many just lifted from the resource and did not elaborate further. Other candidates gave their opinions about migration rather than answering the question about how media can influence perceptions.

Summary of key points:

1. **AO1 explain questions**: Candidates need to know the difference in what is required when they are asked to 'describe' something versus when the command word asks them to 'explain'.

2. **AO3 evaluate questions**: These questions can either have the command word 'evaluate' or the candidate can be provided with a statement where they are asked 'to what extent do you agree'. For both styles of questions, candidates should provide both points of view and then say which side of the argument they agree with.

3. **Understanding of concepts:** The specification sets out the subject content that candidates are expected to know before they sit the examination. However, teachers should ensure that candidates develop genuine understanding, rather than simply repeating or describing what has been taught. For example, when learning about water movement through a drainage basin, candidates should understand more than a list of key terms. Although the specification identifies stores, flows, inputs and outputs as areas candidates should know, effective understanding depends on seeing how these elements work together.

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UNIT 2 – DEVELOPING FIELDWORK SKILLS

Overview of the Unit

The 2026 examination series is the first in which the Unit 2 NEA has been assessed and marked as part of the new GCSE Geography Qualifications for Wales (QFF) qualification. This year, centres selected either Geographical Flows or Settlement as the basis for the enquiry. Most candidates were able to complete a fieldwork enquiry using the six-stage enquiry process. As required by the specification, three of the four assessment objectives (AOs) were examined across the NEA with each task assessing a single objective.

Some areas where candidates particularly struggled this year include:

AO2 Tasks: There is scope for candidates to develop a clearer understanding of the role of enquiry questions in fieldwork investigations. Candidates should be able to justify why their chosen enquiry question is appropriate, demonstrate its relevance to the aims of the investigation, and use it to guide meaningful conclusions based on the evidence collected. They should also be able to make clear links between their enquiry question and the conclusions reached, ensuring that their findings directly address the focus and objectives of the investigation.

AO3 Tasks: Most candidates were able to analyse patterns and trends, using data effectively to quantify and qualify their findings. However, many found it more challenging to make meaningful links between primary and secondary data sources and to demonstrate clear interrelationships between them. Greater emphasis should be placed on developing candidates' ability to synthesise evidence from different sources to support more detailed analysis.

AO4 Tasks: A significant number of candidates did not attempt Task 3a and 3b. Candidates should develop their ability to select at least two sets of primary data and secondary data that are relevant to the enquiry question. Greater emphasis should be placed on ensuring that candidates can explain how different data sets contribute to answering the enquiry questions and support the overall aims of the investigation. Candidates would also benefit from developing their evaluation skills by considering further areas of investigation arising from their findings. Opportunities should be provided for candidates to reflect on the geographical questions generated by their results and how these might be investigated further.

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Comments on individual questions/sections

Task 1a (AO2): Candidates were required to plan their enquiry question/s and give a clear justification as to why the question/s were appropriate to be awarded 3 marks. Many candidates identified enquiry questions that were linked to their chosen topic area. However, few candidates successfully explained why their enquiry question was suitable for the investigation. Greater emphasis is needed on ensuring candidates can justify their choice of enquiry question and demonstrate how it supports the aims and intended outcomes of their investigation.

Task 1b AO4: Many candidates included Ordnance Survey maps, but these were often not sufficiently detailed, with grid references and annotations used to identify the study sites frequently missing. This resulted in a mean mark of 2.2 for this task. Candidates should ensure that Ordnance Survey maps are provided with the study sites clearly located using four and six figure grid references and detailed annotations.

Task 1c (AO2): Candidates could identify several safety risks and most considered the risk level these posed. Many candidates could also suggest appropriate strategies to reduce the risk level. Candidates also gave consideration of the impact of other restrictions on their data collection. However, the mean mark for this task was 3.3. Many candidates did not make detailed reference to the need to be sympathetic geographers. Candidates also need to fully consider factors such as human rights/diversity and/or environmental impacts of their fieldwork investigation to gain marks for this part of the task.

Task 2a (AO4): Most candidates provided a detailed description of how data collection sites were selected and gave clear reasons why these locations were appropriate for the investigation. Sampling methods were often described effectively. However, candidates found it more challenging to justify the size of their sample and explain the factors that influenced this decision. Candidates could further develop their understanding of how to plan and obtain a representative and inclusive sample to improve the reliability and validity of their findings and explain these decisions within their investigation.

Tasks 3a & 3b (AO4): A significant number of candidates did not attempt tasks 3(a) and 3(b). Candidates would benefit from further development in selecting at least two relevant sources of primary and some secondary data to address the enquiry question. Greater emphasis should be placed on helping candidates explain how different data sets contribute to the investigation, support the enquiry question, and help achieve the overall aims of the study.

Task 3c (AO4): The mean mark for this task was 3.3. Candidates performed relatively well in this aspect of the task, successfully selecting and applying two or more appropriate numerical and statistical techniques. In most cases, these techniques were used accurately, and the processes and calculations were clearly presented within the report.

Task 3d (AO4): Again, candidates performed well in this task, with a mean mark of 4.3. Candidates demonstrated a good understanding of data presentation, selecting and completing two or more appropriate techniques with a high degree of accuracy. In most cases, presentations included the essential conventions, including titles, scales, labels and keys, allowing findings to be displayed clearly and effectively.

Task 4 (AO3): The mean mark for this task was 3.5. Candidates were generally able to identify and describe patterns and trends within their data, making some use of evidence to quantify or qualify their observations. Many also made links back to the original enquiry question. However, candidates found it more challenging to establish clear connections between primary and secondary data sources and to use these links effectively to support

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their analysis and conclusions. Further development is needed in synthesising different sources of data to produce more integrated and evaluative responses.

Task 5a (AO3): Candidates performed well in drawing conclusions that generally addressed the original enquiry question(s). Most candidates selected relevant primary and secondary data to support their conclusions and were able to use this evidence to support their findings.

Task 5b (AO2): The mean mark for this task was 2.7. Some candidates were able to clearly explain how their enquiry conclusions linked to wider geographical concepts. However, many candidates need to strengthen their responses by making clear and direct links between their enquiry findings and relevant geographical concepts.

Task 6a (AO3): The mean mark for this task was 4.2. Many candidates demonstrated good evaluative skills by considering the strengths and weaknesses of each of the five stages of the enquiry. The most successful responses made clear judgements about the validity of each stage and evaluated them using appropriate sub-headings, resulting in a well-structured and thorough evaluation.

Task 6b (AO4): This was the task on which candidates performed least successfully, achieving the lowest facility factor of all questions on the paper. The mean mark was 1.9. Candidates generally identified areas for improvement, although detailed and valid suggestions were not always developed. To access the highest marks, candidates should provide more specific recommendations and clearly explain how these would improve the enquiry.

Summary of key points:

AO2: Candidates should demonstrate a clear understanding of geographical concepts throughout their enquiry. This includes justifying the choice of enquiry question, showing how it is relevant to their investigation, and explaining how the findings link to wider geographical ideas. Strong responses also show an awareness of ethical and environmental considerations, including the importance of being a sympathetic geographer and considering the impacts of fieldwork on people and places.

AO3: Candidates should be able to interpret and analyse data effectively, identifying patterns, trends and relationships and supporting observations with evidence. Conclusions should be clearly linked to the enquiry question and be based on both primary and secondary data where appropriate. Higher-level responses demonstrate the ability to synthesise information from different sources and critically evaluate the reliability, validity and overall success of the enquiry.

AO4: Candidates should confidently apply a range of geographical skills throughout the enquiry process. This includes using maps accurately, selecting appropriate sampling methods, collecting relevant primary and secondary data, and applying suitable statistical and presentation techniques. Candidates should justify their methodological choices, present data clearly and accurately, and demonstrate an understanding of how improvements to methods could enhance the reliability, validity and effectiveness of the investigation.

Presentation and Organisation

It is important to note that most NEAs were clearly structured, with each task identified using clear titles and headings. This enabled the enquiry process to be followed logically and ensured that evidence for each assessment criteria could be located and assessed efficiently. Centres are encouraged to adopt a clear and consistent structure when

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presenting NEA investigations, as this allows examiners to clearly identify candidates' responses to each task and apply the marking criteria more effectively and consistently.

Advice for Centres

Centres are reminded that the purpose of Unit 2 is to develop candidates' understanding of geographical fieldwork and enquiry, while providing opportunities to apply a range of geographical, mathematical and statistical skills.

It is recommended that the six-stage enquiry model should not be taught in isolation. The strongest responses came from candidates who were familiar with the enquiry process through regular application across a range of geographical topics and contexts. Centres are therefore encouraged to embed and reinforce the six-stage enquiry model throughout the delivery of Units 1 and 3, enabling candidates to develop their understanding progressively and apply the process confidently in both fieldwork investigations and examination questions.

Candidates should be encouraged to develop these skills throughout the course, rather than solely in preparation for the NEA. The expected coverage of mathematical and statistical skills is outlined in Appendix B (pages 45-46) of the specification.

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Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.
Tel: **029 2026 5114**
Email: Gcsegeography@wjec.co.uk
Qualification webpage: https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/gcse-geography-teaching-from-2025/ - tab_keydocuments

See other useful contacts here: Useful Contacts | WJEC

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