

GCSE Geography Qualification Outline – Consultation Version



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Introduction

This document provides a high-level overview of the proposed WJEC GCSE Geography qualification.

It is based on Qualifications Wales's Approval Criteria (key sections are included in Appendix 1). Our qualification **must** meet these requirements.

The qualification outline will provide a guide for the development of the Specification and Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs).

Qualification Overview

The GCSE Geography qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales by:

- Supporting the statements of what matters¹ by giving learners the opportunity to:
 - gain a deeper understanding of the concepts underpinning humanities, and their application in local, national and global contexts
 - helping learners gather, justify, present, analyse, and evaluate a range of evidence
 - explore how and why interpretations may differ and by critical understanding of a range of interpretations and representations derived from a variety of evidence
 - experiencing the wonder of the natural world
 - understanding and appreciating how and why places, landscapes and environments in their locality and elsewhere in Wales, as well as in the wider world, are changing
 - develop an understanding of how human actions in the past and present can affect interrelationships between the natural world and people
 - heighten learners' awareness of how the future sustainability of our world and climate change is influenced by the impact of those actions
 - appreciate how the evolution of places, communities and societies is driven by the interplay between a range of factors, including environmental, economic, social, political and cultural processes and human actions
 - develop an understanding of their responsibilities as citizens of Wales and the wider interconnected world
 - encourage learners to develop as self-aware, informed, ethical global citizens, who critically reflect on their own and others' beliefs, values and attitudes.

- Supporting the principles of progression² by encouraging learners to:
 - ask increasingly sophisticated enquiry questions
 - demonstrate greater independence in finding suitable information, making informed predictions and hypotheses, and making judgments
 - increase their breadth and depth of knowledge and underlying concepts
 - develop an understanding of themselves in the world
 - demonstrate an ability to work with an increasing number and sophistication of sources of information, as well as a growing understanding of how to resolve contradictory or conflicting accounts

¹ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/statements-of-what-matters/>

² <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/principles-of-progression/>

- demonstrate a growing ability to transfer existing skills and knowledge into new, and increasingly unfamiliar contexts.
- Supporting the subject specific considerations for Geography³ by:
 - providing opportunities to understand and investigate physical and human landscapes, and a context for the causes and consequences of physical and human inter-relationships and interdependence which characterise our modern world
 - providing opportunities to understand and investigate key geographical issues
 - equipping learners with the skills to question, use and analyse maps, images, and geographical information systems
 - equipping learners with the geographical skills to formulate research questions, and to collect, manipulate and present data so they can evaluate and think critically about problems and issues
 - providing a range of opportunities to learn outdoors, through fieldwork and the outdoor classroom, and to experience and reflect on the wonder of the natural world in a variety of physical, human and historical environments.

The GCSE Geography qualification will also be based on the following geographical concepts listed within section 6.1 of the published Approval Criteria:

- place and space⁴
- scale
- process
- continuity⁵ and change
- inter-relationships
- diversity
- environment
- interpretation.

Each of these concepts have been mapped to concepts stated within the Welsh Government 'designing your curriculum' guidance as well as those within the statements of what matters and progression steps for Humanities. They have also been mapped to the Geographical Association concepts.

Proposed Qualification Structure

Unit 1: Core Concepts in Geography

Written examination

30% of qualification

Unit 2: Developing Fieldwork Skills

Non-examination assessment – enquiry tasks

25% of qualification

Set by WJEC, marked by the centre and moderated by WJEC

Unit 3: Contemporary Issues in Geography

Written examination

30% of qualification

³ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/designing-your-curriculum/#specific-considerations-for-this-area>

⁴ We have placed the two concepts together due to their natural inter-relationship.

⁵ We have added continuity to this concept to reflect the Geographical Association concepts [GA-Curriculum-Framework-2022-WEB-final.pdf](#)

Unit 4: Potential Sustainable Solutions
Non-examination assessment – decision making exercise
15% of qualification
Set and marked by WJEC

This will be a unitised qualification.

Aside from Unit 1, which is an introductory unit, there is no hierarchy implied by the order in which the three other units are presented. Therefore, the order does not imply a prescribed teaching order.

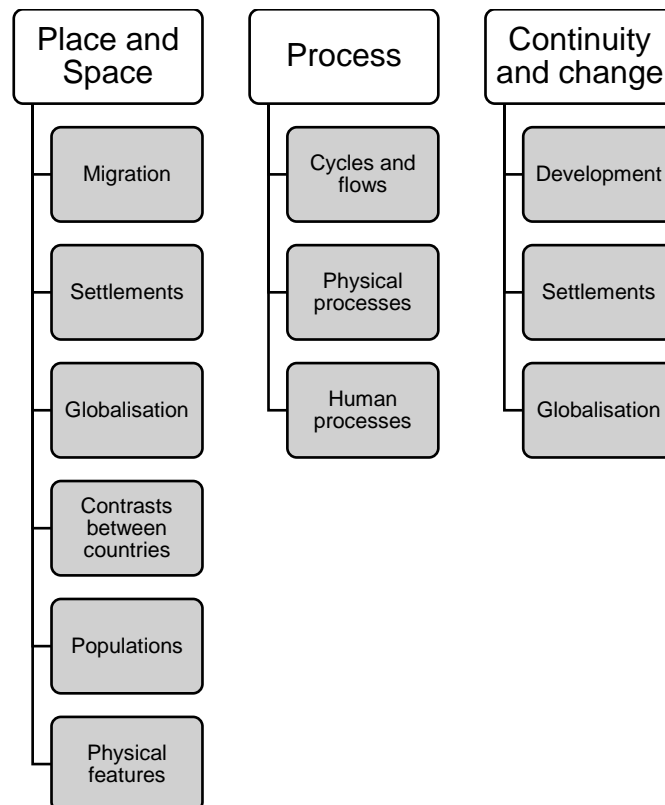
Unit Information

Unit 1 - Core Concepts in Geography

The purpose of this unit is to:

- **introduce learners to the key concepts to be explored throughout the course**
- **explore both physical and human geography**
- **include core topics that will set the context for the course and give the background needed to complete the other three units.**

This unit will be based on the following concepts and possible topics:



The unit will be assessed via an examination available in the summer series with a mix of question types that will target AO1, AO2 and AO3. An examination will be made available for the first cohort in summer 2026. The focus is likely to be on AO1 having the highest

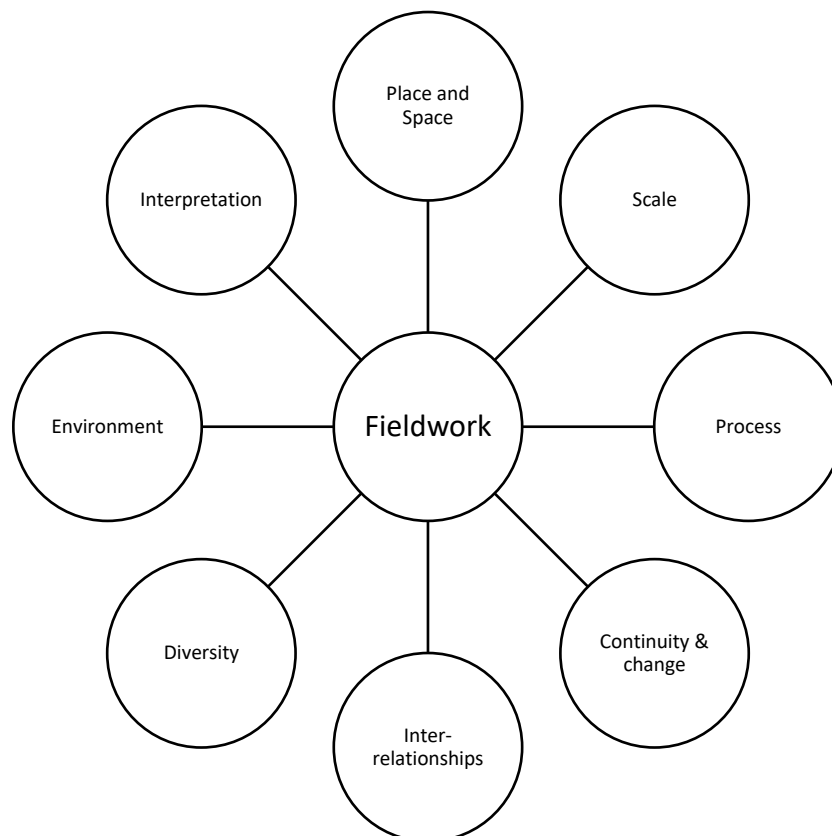
weighting, followed by AO2 and AO3. The duration of the examination is likely to be approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. There will be no optionality in this unit.

Unit 2 - Developing Fieldwork Skills

The purpose of this unit is to:

- explore both fieldwork and skills
- develop an understanding of the six-stage enquiry model.

This unit will be based on the following concepts and possible topics:



The unit will take the form of non-examination assessment, available in the summer series, first available in 2026, with a mix of tasks that will target AO2, AO3 and AO4. AO3 is likely to receive the highest weighting (due to the investigative skills and the emphasis on justification and evaluation) followed by AO4 and then AO2. The non-examination assessment will follow a multi-stage process. WJEC will set two topic areas a year from: cycles and flows, settlements, sustainability, risks and mitigation, inequality, population, place and space, change over time. The list of topics will be published at the start of the qualification for upcoming years. Centres will be able to choose one of the two topics to explore in their locality. Centres will submit the completed non-examination assessment in the summer of the year it is undertaken. The tasks will focus on justifying and evaluating the fieldwork choices made, rather than describing them (which is an AO1 skill which does not feature in this non-examination assessment). Learners will have a choice in how to present their tasks. The non-examination assessment will be marked by centres and moderated by WJEC. The undertaking of the fieldwork is likely to feature a low level of control to enable learners to undertake an authentic enquiry experience. However, assessed tasks are likely to be taken

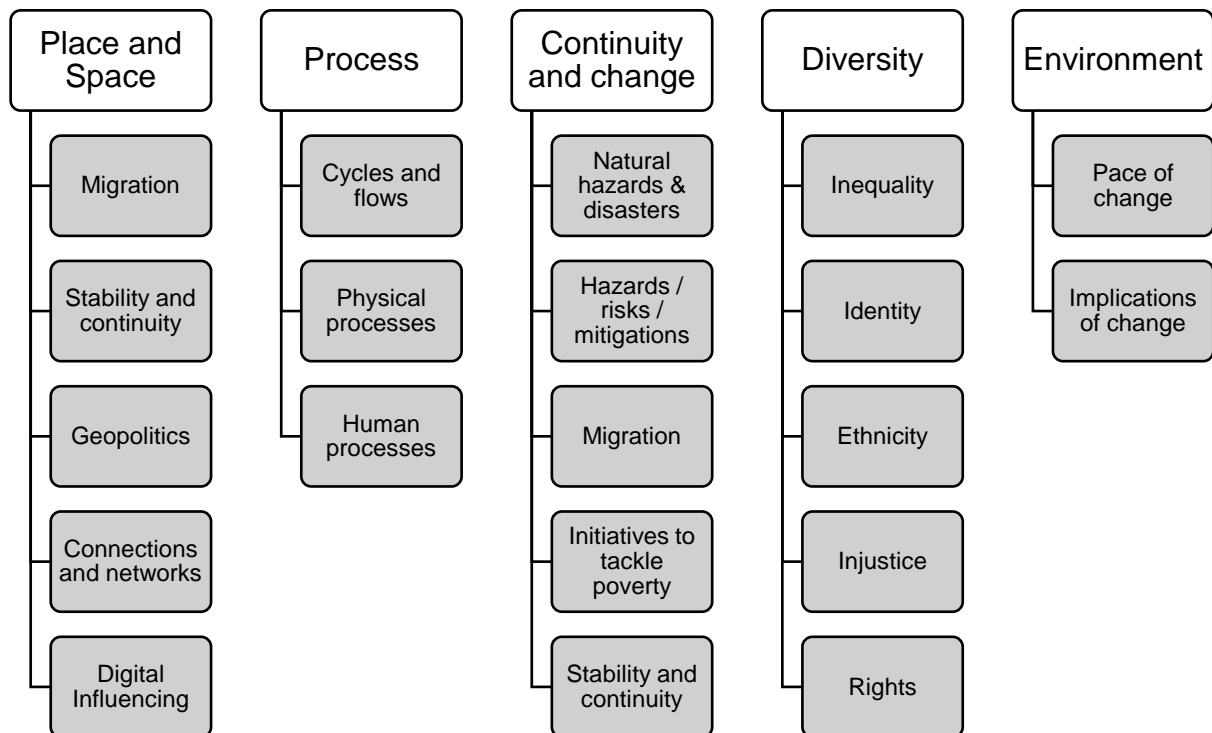
under a high level of control. The assessment **must** be submitted digitally. The time allowed for the assessment will be approximately three to four hours (not including the time it takes to undertake the fieldwork).

Unit 3 – Contemporary Issues in Geography

The purpose of this unit is to:

- introduce learners to thematic areas such as endangered environments (land and ocean) and resource use, weather, climate and climate change, endangered environments, migration, integration and segregation, trade and aid, social and global inequality

This unit will be based on the following concepts and possible topics:



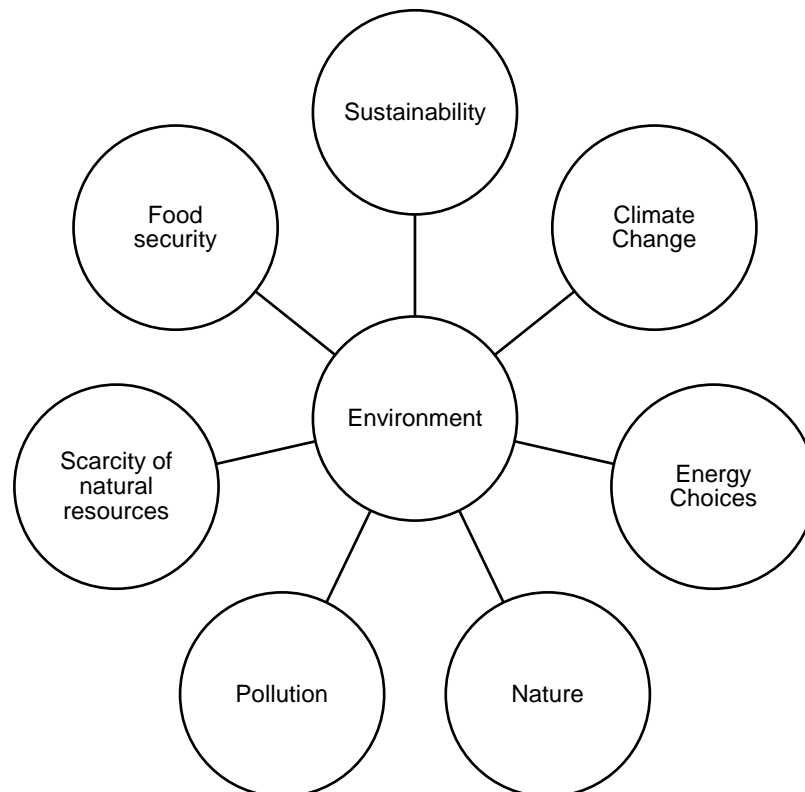
The unit will be assessed via an examination available in the summer series, with a mix of question types that will target AO1, AO2 and AO3. As this unit encourages greater critical thinking, AO3 is likely to have the higher weighting in this paper with AO1 and AO2 having similar weightings. The duration of the examination is likely to be approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. There will be no optionality in this unit.

Unit 4 - Potential Sustainable Solutions

The purpose of this unit is to:

- explore current geographical issues and sustainable futures
- introduce the three pillars of sustainability and sustainability goals, based on taking action (energy and food, hazards, mitigating risks, water, housing)
- increase problem solving skills

This unit will be based on the following possible topics:



The unit will take the form of non-examination assessment available in the summer series, with a mix of tasks that will target AO2, AO3 and AO4. AO4 is likely to receive the highest weighting, followed by AO2 and AO3. There will be no optionality in this unit. The non-examination assessment will feature an annual scenario based on a geographical issue which then presents three possible solutions to the issue. Learners will be required to research and justify which solution they think would best to address the issue, stating why they wouldn't select the other two solutions. Tasks will remain for the lifetime of the specification. This will be set and marked by WJEC. The undertaking of the research is likely to feature a low level of control to enable learners to undertake an authentic enquiry experience. However, assessed tasks are likely to be taken under a high level of control. The assessment **must** be submitted digitally. The time allowed for the assessment will be approximately four hours (two hours for research and two hours for completing tasks).

Consideration of manageability, engagement, validity and reliability

In developing this proposed qualification outline, we have considered manageability, engagement, reliability and validity and how to balance these considerations in the context of the requirements of the Approval Criteria.

The Approval Criteria require 40% of the qualification to be assessed by non-examination assessment; one non-examination assessment must be set by WJEC, internally marked by the centre and moderated by WJEC, and the other must be set and marked by WJEC.

This poses some potential manageability challenges which we propose to minimise by allowing centres to spread the workload and assessment. As the Approval Criteria state that the qualification is unitised, we propose making both non-examination assessments available in the summer term of both the first and second year of teaching to give centres some choice in deciding when to undertake the non-examination assessments. We have also considered the assessment time that we have allocated to both non-examination assessments to try to reduce the impact on teaching and learning. Both non-examination assessments will feature tasks that require practical enquiry (undertaking fieldwork and undertaking research for the decision making exercise). To aid manageability we would foresee these featuring a low level of control to enable learners to undertake an authentic enquiry experience. However, in order to ensure reliability, we will provide guidance on what notes are able to be used from the practical enquiry when responding to the assessment tasks. When undertaking the assessed tasks, we have concluded that a high level of control is considered crucial to assure reliability. This will secure the requirement of the Approval Criteria that learners can demonstrate their geographical research, enquiry and investigation skills, including critical thinking skills and the ability to reflect. We understand that undertaking fieldwork can cause manageability issues for centres. Therefore, we have taken this into consideration by asking centres to undertake one fieldwork enquiry, rather than the two that are required by the current GCSE.

We believe that our proposed qualification should provide opportunities for centres to develop an engaging programme of study for its learners, in line with the expectations of the Curriculum for Wales. Unit 1 will cover both physical and human geography, allowing for a range of topics to be covered, and will allow them to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts underpinning geography, and their application in local, national and global contexts. This will allow for interconnections to be explored, thus building a sense of cynefin. Unit 2 will enable learners to engage with out of classroom learning in contrasting environments. This will provide learners with a real-world context to their learning. A range of contemporary issues in Unit 3 will enable learners to develop skills that help them evaluate sources of information, analyse issues and challenge or support their existing views. The unit will help learners discover and advocate for the issues they care most about and will enable interesting debate within the classroom. Unit 4 will help to foster a curiosity amongst learners to explore geographical causes, effects and consequences. As the unit will be focused on sustainability, research has shown that the decision making/solution focused approach creates a more positive view of sustainability solutions, rather than just dwelling on problems. This in turn reduces feeling of hopelessness that can surround discussions on sustainability and instead aims to engage learners to feel empowered to make an active contribution to society's overall development towards a sustainable society.

We believe that the non-examination assessments we propose for Units 2 and 4 are a valid approach to assessing the purpose and content because they allow learners to demonstrate

their skills in appropriate contexts. To ensure the reliability of the non-examination assessments, we will ensure each unit will target the same assessment objective weightings each series. For both units marking criteria will be developed and for Unit 2, teachers will be provided with a package of support to ensure consistent application of the marking criteria across centres and over time. We will moderate a sample of candidate work from each centre to provide further assurance of reliability.

We believe that the purpose and content of Units 1 and 3 can be validly assessed by examination, and a mix of question types can help us maximise validity. When we develop assessments, we will ensure that all tasks target the relevant construct, that there is an appropriate balance of content covered over time and that there is alignment between assessment items and learning outcomes. Where appropriate, we will use data available to us on how an assessment has functioned. To ensure reliability, we will make sure that the examined units target the same assessment objective weightings and have a consistent level of demand each series, marking criteria will be developed and assessors will be trained on how to apply them consistently.

We will continue to consider the balance of manageability, engagement, reliability and validity, at each stage of qualification development.

Appendix 1

Key information from Approval Criteria

The following information has come directly from Qualifications Wales's [GCSE Geography - Approval Criteria](#) - our qualification must meet these requirements.

Purpose

1. **GCSE Geography** must:
 - 1.1 be designed primarily for *Learners* between the ages of 14 and 16
 - 1.2 build on the conceptual understanding *Learners* have developed through their learning from ages 3-14
 - 1.3 support teaching and learning by providing appropriately broad, demanding, relevant and engaging content and assessment that relates to and supports the Curriculum for Wales, including its [four purposes](#)
 - 1.4 allow *Learners* to develop a strong foundation of knowledge, skills and understanding which supports progression to post-16 study and prepares them for life, learning and work
 - 1.5 provide meaningful, fair and accurate information on *Learner* achievement within a subject that highlights what *Learners* know, understand and can do

Aims

2. **GCSE Geography** must:
 - 2.1. allow *Learners* to explore a range of knowledge, skills and understanding in relation to geography
 - 2.2. provide opportunities for *Learners* to be assessed in a variety of relevant and meaningful contexts
3. The **GCSE Geography** qualification must support *Learners* to:
 - 3.1. become independent, balanced and sympathetic geographers with a detailed understanding of spatial relationships and the changing world
 - 3.2. appreciate the complex, pluralistic and diverse nature of societies and their interactions with diverse and dynamic physical landscapes
 - 3.3. demonstrate a geographical viewpoint on values, attitudes and perspectives surrounding the interrelationships between people and their environment
 - 3.4. apply geographical understanding and practice to a range of contexts and enquiries
 - 3.5. foster a curiosity to explore geographical causes, effects and consequences
 - 3.6. make sense of the world to work towards a sustainable future

Assessment Objectives

- The assessment of the knowledge, understanding and skills required in the qualification must target the following assessment objectives in line with the indicated weightings, within a tolerance of +/- 5 percentage points.

AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of places, people, environments and processes at a variety of scales	25%
AO2	Apply knowledge and understanding to geographical concepts	25%

AO3	Analyse, evaluate, or make judgements from a variety of sources, synthesising where appropriate	25%
AO4	Select, use and apply skills and techniques in practice used by geographers to support geographical enquiry.	25%

Scheme of assessment

- The **GCSE Geography** qualification must be unitised.
- The qualification will not be tiered.

The **GCSE Geography** specification must include the following assessment arrangements:

11.1. two examination assessments that:

- 11.1.1. are set and marked by the awarding body
- 11.1.2. account for 60% of the qualification

12. The timing of the examinations must be prescribed by the awarding body.

13. There must be two non-examination assessments that account for 40% of the qualification:

- 13.1. one non-examination assessment set by the awarding body, internally marked by the school, and externally moderated by the awarding body
- 13.2. one non-examination assessment set and externally marked by the awarding body
- 13.3. both non-examination assessments must be able to be submitted digitally

14. One examination unit must be available in the summer of 2026 for the first cohort of *Learners* taking the qualification.