

Changing Places – further information about the Specification changes

The necessary modifications to *Changing Places* are in line with the subject Aims and Objectives. These state that the WJEC AS and A level in Geography requires learners to:

- recognise and be able to analyse the complexity of people-environment interactions at all geographical scales, and appreciate how these underpin understanding of some of ***the key issues facing the world today***.
- improve their understanding ... and develop the ***knowledge and ability to engage, as citizens, with the questions and issues arising***.

Since the course was written in 2015-16, people and places in the UK have experienced:

- Brexit – implications for migration and tourist flows, inward investment, supply chains and import-export costs.
- Covid-19 pandemic – short-term lockdowns and longer-term business closures and further growth of online retailing, remote working, food deliveries, etc.
- Cost-of-living crisis (linked with events in Ukraine) – consequences have included yet more costs for businesses, reduced discretionary spending on goods and services by consumers, greater use of food banks etc.
- Large-scale strikes - called by transport, teaching and medical unions.

Changing Places 2.1.5 bullet 1

As originally phrased, the Specification required learners to study ‘retailing, commercial and entertainment expansion ... and their demographic and economic drivers including rising affluence and technological change.’

- Having grown up during and after the events listed above, learners will be all too aware that many settlements and businesses are *not* expanding - and in many cases are *contracting or closing*. In recent years, several large high street names have gone into liquidation, including Wilko. Argos, Boots and Sports Direct have closed some stores.
- Small and larger central business districts alike now have a rising proportion of vacant properties, or are changing in character as recognisable chain stores are replaced by charity or vape shops. For example, Cardiff City Centre has a large vacant site where House of Fraser previously stood, and the entire basement floor of the St David’s shopping centre is now vacant.
- The original assumption in the first edition of the Specification of ‘rising affluence’ has also been modified. Students will be aware from watching the news or observing events in their own neighbourhood – possibly including their own school - that many workers have reluctantly gone on strike. This is because wages have fallen rather than risen in real terms - due to double-figure inflation in 2022 and much of 2023.

The revised phrasing better reflects the UK in 2024. ‘Retailing, commercial and entertainment expansion’ has been changed to: ‘Retailing, commercial and entertainment change.’ ‘Rising affluence’ has been changed to: ‘income change’.

Changing Places 2.1.10 bullet 3

A new bullet has been added to section 10: **‘New challenges of managing change in some urban communities associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and economic change.’** It is envisaged that this section will allow learners to explore in more detail the legacy of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis on communities, perhaps in their own local area.

Possible approaches include:

- Looking for local evidence of geographical inequalities, local tensions and issues that have worsened since pandemic lockdowns began.
- Keeping an eye on new government policies for badly-affected and ‘left-behind’ places and regions, especially those relevant to the students’ home area, or places that they have used as case studies in other parts of the course.
- Encouraging students to consider looking at these issues as part of their NEA, for example by mapping land use changes and vacancies in central business districts, and interviewing small businesses about rising costs and changing customer behaviour.

There are a number of sources available to find the latest information. In particular, the *Financial Times* offers access to its large store of detailed articles about towns, cities and economies. A selection is available online, several of which offer an excellent starting place for up-to-date information about *Changing Places*.

This article enables you to scrutinize your local area <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-63799670>. You can also access the article ‘How the UK high street was hit by the pandemic: look up your area’ at: <https://www.ft.com/content/353f260f-31b9-4da6-8562-837012af8c9d>

Within this article from the *Financial Times*, a second link will take you to the page where it is possible to enter the name or post code of the students’ home area. For example, a search for ‘Cardiff Bay’ tells us that: ‘This neighbourhood is having a very poor recovery from the pandemic, with in-person sales in May 2022 down 7.5 per cent on May 2019 levels. Across the whole period, this neighbourhood has had a startlingly poor pandemic.’ Or follow this link directly: <https://www.ft.com/content/9348c644-288f-42e7-9f4b-edea8b71be5b>

The *Financial Times* also provides an article that explains the cost-of-living crisis, making synoptic links with Year 13 Global Systems and Energy themes: <https://www.ft.com/content/c7578395-5297-415f-ab88-73cb62c1a51a>

This report provides a summary of the challenges and changes facing the high street <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/creating-resilient-and-revitalised-high-streets-new-normal>. Another article explores the need for new policies for high streets following economic shocks. This includes a chart showing the urgency of public funding required to regenerate and ‘Level Up’ places – with scores provided for Caerphilly, Derby and other named settlements: <https://www.ft.com/content/5f207771-9682-4b85-9eee-5a9220f0aeb3>

Changing Places 2.1.8 bullet 1

Finally, a minor modification has been made to section 8. The word 'Broadband' has been replaced with 'digital connectivity'. This better reflects the world in 2024 in two ways:

1. Data is transmitted wirelessly through 4G and 5G services, not just through fixed broadband.
2. 'Digital connectivity' is arguably more helpful for learners – it may prompt them to think about the importance of digital infrastructure needed for remote working, shopping, gaming, social networking and other valued activities.