

# GCSE Geography: Decisions on Conditions and Guidance



In December 2014 we published a consultation about the rules and guidance we proposed to put in place for reformed GCSEs (graded 9 to 1) in geography.

This consultation set out draft Subject Level Conditions and guidance which would apply to all reformed GCSEs in geography.

We have reviewed the responses to the consultation and are now announcing our decisions. We are also publishing a more detailed analysis of the responses alongside this document.<sup>1</sup>

## Conditions and requirements for GCSE geography

### Content requirements

We proposed that all reformed GCSEs in geography should comply with the subject content requirements published by the Department for Education,<sup>2</sup> and with our assessment objectives.

Respondents generally supported this approach, which is consistent with our requirements for other reformed GCSEs. No respondents raised any significant concerns with our proposed requirements.

### Fieldwork statements

We proposed that awarding organisations should take all reasonable steps to ensure schools provide statements that evidence the opportunities students have been given to carry out geographical fieldwork. We also set out in detail the information those statements should contain.

Responses focused largely on the need to ensure fieldwork statements do not place an unnecessary burden on schools. Some awarding organisations were also concerned about the extent to which they needed to verify fieldwork statements and the burden this would place both on them and on schools.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-reform-regulations-for-geography](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-reform-regulations-for-geography)

<sup>2</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-geography](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-geography)

In response to these concerns, we have made some changes to the drafting of our Conditions. These clarify that we do not expect awarding organisations to carry out onerous, detailed checks on the fieldwork statements submitted by schools. We have also removed the more detailed requirements around the content of the fieldwork statement, as these are already made clear in the subject content.

### **Approach to mathematical and statistical skills**

We proposed that reformed GCSEs in geography should include 10 per cent of marks allocated to the mathematical and statistical techniques specified in the subject content.

Most respondents thought that a 10 per cent weighting was broadly appropriate, although some felt this should be a minimum (rather than exact) weighting. Some respondents also expressed concern that students who find maths challenging (or had not been taught the required techniques in maths) might be unfairly disadvantaged.

The subject content set out a range of skills and techniques that specifications should cover. Given this, and the expectations around the use of mathematical and statistical skills at AS and A level, our view remains that a 10 per cent weighting is appropriate for GCSE geography. However, we accept the comments that requiring an exact weighting could unnecessarily constrain assessment design. We have decided instead to make the 10 per cent weighting a minimum for GCSE geography.

### **Approach to spelling, punctuation and grammar**

We also proposed that, as in current GCSEs, reformed GCSEs in geography should include 5 per cent of marks allocated to accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar, and the use of specialist terminology.

Respondents generally thought that 5 per cent was a reasonable weighting, although some raised concerns about how this would impact on students with learning disabilities. Some respondents also commented that the proposed drafting was not clear about how we expected these marks to be included in mark schemes.

Our view remains that a 5 per cent weighting for accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar, and the use of specialist terminology is the most appropriate way to reflect the curriculum intentions for GCSE geography, whilst minimising adverse impacts on assessment design and on students with learning disabilities.

In response to the comments about the clarity of drafting, we have reworded our requirements to make our expectations clearer.

# **Guidance for GCSE geography**

## **Guidance on subject content**

We proposed to introduce guidance which clarified how awarding organisations should assess the parts of the subject content which relate to fieldwork.

Respondents raised a number of concerns with our proposed approach. In particular, respondents felt that assessing four different areas of knowledge, skills and understanding in every year would lead to superficial assessments that did not cover the content in appropriate depth. Respondents felt that assessing three areas would allow for more effective assessment. Respondents also disagreed with our view that some of the six areas of knowledge, skills and understanding were more demanding than others.

Based on this feedback, we have decided to make changes to our approach, and are adopting an approach in line with that suggested by some respondents. Our revised guidance expects awarding organisations to sample all areas of fieldwork knowledge, skills and understanding in sufficient depth, achieve balanced coverage over time, avoid predictability and maintain an appropriate level of demand. We have chosen not to specify how many areas awarding organisations should cover each year, because the subject content already imposes sufficient restrictions.

We have also made changes to wording to clarify that we do not expect awarding organisations to use students' own data in assessment – but they may do so if they wish.

## **Guidance on assessment objectives**

We proposed to introduce guidance clarifying the interpretation of our assessment objectives.

Most respondents supported our proposed guidance, although some suggested improvements to our proposed wording. Views were split on whether students should be expected to assess situations and materials which were not explicit in the specification, with some respondents suggesting this was unfair to students, and others noting it would help reduce predictability.

We have amended the wording of some of our guidance to make our expectations clearer, but have not made any substantial changes.

## Other issues

Some respondents expressed concern about assessing fieldwork in exams for GCSE geography. Others were concerned that the removal of tiering might make assessments too challenging for some students.

We have already considered these concerns in response to an earlier consultation,<sup>3</sup> and the responses to this consultation have not raised any new issues that cause us to revisit these earlier decisions.

## Next steps

Alongside this document, we have published final Subject Level Conditions<sup>4</sup> and Subject Level Guidance<sup>5</sup> for GCSE geography.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141110161323/http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/gcse-reform-june-2013>

<sup>4</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-geography](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-geography)

<sup>5</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-guidance-for-geography](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-guidance-for-geography)