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The post-16 subject guidance series currently comprises: art and design; business education; classics; design and technology; drama and theatre studies; engineering and manufacturing; English; geography; government and politics; health and social care; history; information and communication technology; law; mathematics; media education; modern foreign languages; music; physical education; religious studies; science; sociology.

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## Introduction

This booklet aims to help inspectors and staff in schools and colleges to evaluate standards and quality in geography for students post-16. It complements the *Handbook for Inspecting Secondary Schools* (1999), the supplement *Inspecting School Sixth Forms* (2001) and the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* (2001). It replaces the earlier guidance *Inspecting Subjects and Aspects 11–18* (1999).

This guidance concentrates on issues specific to geography. General guidance is in the *Handbooks*. Use both to get a complete picture of the inspection or evaluation process.

This booklet is concerned with evaluating standards and achievement, teaching and learning, and other factors that affect what is achieved. It outlines how to use students' work and question them, the subject-specific points to look for in lessons, and how to draw evaluations together to form a coherent view of the subject.

Examples are provided of evidence and evaluations from college and school-sixth form inspections, with commentaries to give further explanation. These examples are included without any reference to context, and will not necessarily illustrate all of the features that inspectors will need to consider. The booklets in the series show different ways of recording and reporting evidence and findings; they do not prescribe or endorse any particular method or approach.

Inspectors and senior staff in schools and colleges may need to evaluate several subjects and refer to more than one booklet. You can download any of the subject guidance booklets from OFSTED's website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Our Inspection Helpline team, on 020 7421 6680 for schools and 020 7421 6703 for colleges, will be pleased to respond to your questions. Alternatively, you can email [schoolinspection@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:schoolinspection@ofsted.gov.uk) or [collegeinspection@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:collegeinspection@ofsted.gov.uk).

OFSTED's remit for this sector is the inspection of education for students aged 16–19, other than work-based education. In schools, this is the sixth-form provision. In colleges, the 16–19 age-group will not be so clearly identifiable; classes are likely to include older students and, in some cases, they will have a majority of older students. In practice, inspectors and college staff will evaluate the standards and quality in these classes regardless of the age of the students.

As the inspector with responsibility for geography, you will mainly be looking at the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced Level (A-level) courses in geography and, if the institution has any students working for it, the Advanced Extension Award (AEA). The examples in this booklet are taken from these courses.

This booklet concentrates on the most commonly found courses in geography for students 16-19. However, the principles illustrated in this guidance can be applied more widely.



## Common requirements

All inspectors share the responsibility for determining whether a school or college is effective for all its students, whatever their educational needs or personal circumstances. As part of this responsibility, ensure that you have a good understanding of the key characteristics of the institution and its students. Evaluate the achievement of different groups of students and judge how effectively their needs and aspirations are met and any initiatives or courses aimed specifically at these groups of students. Take account of recruitment patterns, retention rates and attendance patterns for programmes and courses for different groups of students. Consider the individual goals and targets set for students within different groups and the progress they make towards achieving them.

You should be aware of the responsibilities and duties of schools and colleges regarding equal opportunities, in particular those defined in the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. These Acts and related codes of practice underpin national policies on inclusion, on raising achievement and on the important role schools and colleges have in fostering better personal, community and race relations, and in addressing and preventing racism.<sup>1</sup>

As well as being thoroughly familiar with subject-specific requirements, be alert to the unique contribution that each subject makes to the wider educational development of students. Assess how well the curriculum and teaching in geography enable all students to develop key skills, and how successfully the subject contributes to the students' personal, social, health and citizenship education, and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Judge how effectively the subject helps prepare students aged 16–19 for adult life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society.

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex *Issues for Inspection arising from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson Report)* in *Evaluating Educational Inclusion*, OFSTED, 2000, p13.





## 1 Standards and achievement

### 1.1 Evaluating standards and achievement

From the previous inspection report, find out what you can about standards and achievement at that time. This will give you a point of comparison with the latest position, but do not forget that there is a trail of performance data, year by year. Analyse and interpret the performance data available for students who have recently completed the course(s). Draw on the school's *Pre-Inspection Context and School Indicator (PICS)* report or, in the case of a college, the *College Performance Report*. Also analyse the most recent results provided by the school or college and any value-added information available. When numbers are small, exercise caution in making comparisons with national data or, for example, evaluating trends. For further guidance on interpreting performance data and analysing value added, refer to *Inspecting School Sixth Forms*, the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* and the *National Summary Data Report for Secondary Schools*.

Where you can, form a view about the standards achieved by different groups of students. For example, there may be data which enable you to compare how male and female students or different ethnic groups are doing, or how well 16–19-year-old students achieve in relation to older students.

Make full use of other information which has a bearing on standards and achievement, including success in completing courses, targets and their achievement, and other measures of success.

You should interpret, in particular:

- trends in results;
- comparisons with other subjects and courses;
- distributions of grades, particularly the occurrence of high grades;
- value-added information;
- the relative performance of male and female students;
- the performance of minorities and different ethnic groups;
- trends in the popularity of courses;
- drop-out or retention rates;
- students' destinations, where data are available.

On the basis of the performance data and other pre-inspection evidence, form hypotheses about the standards achieved, whether they are as high as they should be, and possible explanations. Follow up your hypotheses through observation and analysis of students' work and talking with them. Direct inspection evidence tells you about the standards at which the current students are working, and whether they are being sufficiently stretched. If the current standards are at odds with what the performance data suggest, you must find out why and explain the differences carefully.

In your observations, be alert to any differences in the standards of work of different groups of students.

As you observe students in lessons, look at their work and talk with them, you should concentrate on the extent to which they:

- manage a wide range of geographical information in different forms and from various sources and synthesise these;
- understand the influences that have helped to give a place its distinctive character;
- understand how specific physical features they have studied were formed – for example, a corrie, a coastal spit or a river feature;
- undertake a study on, for example, coastal erosion or do the planning for a geographical decision-making exercise;
- perform important practical tasks such as: a geographical investigation; a land-use transect; use and interpretation of a triangular graph; construction of a cross-section of a river meander bend; or setting about choosing the scale for a map they are about to draw;
- cope with more recent ideas in geography such as humanistic rather than positivist approaches to investigating geographical phenomena;
- make good use of specific learning resources such as maps, school/college texts, magazine articles, library texts and information and communication technology (ICT);

and the extent to which students who are working for the AEA:

- recognise that geographical explanations are often partial, tentative and incomplete;
- appreciate how both physical and human processes bring about changes in spatial systems, distributions and environments;
- understand the role that values and attitudes have in decision-making and exemplify both the potential and the limitation of any single line of inquiry that has been taken;
- identify for themselves geographical questions and issues, interpret evidence well and select appropriate methods of evaluating any data which they have accumulated.

## 1.2 Analysis of students' work

Whenever possible, look at samples of work from students who are of above average, average and below average attainment. You may also ask for work that will help you to follow up a particular hypothesis you may have formed about a group or groups of students. Since analysing written work is a time-consuming task, you need to be selective in the pieces of work you look at from each student. If possible, read at least one sample from each module or section of the course that has been covered in both years of the course. Try to include work undertaken as part of a fieldwork or geographical investigation and one piece of homework which gives insight into the students' research methods and geographical understanding. You should relate your judgements on standards attained to the point in the course when the work was undertaken. The following are issues to consider.

- Is the student acting independently or relying unduly on the teacher's input?
- Are secondary sources being preferred when it would be more appropriate to gather primary evidence, such as from fieldwork?
- How sound are the inferences drawn from any data collected?
- Does the student appreciate the limitations of the study or recognise significant patterns or relationships that may be relevant?
- Can the student suggest improvements or alternative lines of research and enquiry?
- How demanding is the work and how much progress has the student made? Hence, how good is achievement?

Be alert to cases where writing is not the student's own, or is copied or taken from secondary sources or from others without acknowledgement.

### *Example 1: evidence from analysis of work of Year 12 AS-level students in a sixth-form college.*

*A study forming part of a module on the challenge of natural environments, in which students have undertaken, halfway through the course, a study of microclimates in an urban context.*

#### *Highest-attaining student*

*Very good work, at grade A standard for AS-level and leading potentially to a similar standard at A level as well. The work shows a comprehensive, in-depth knowledge of microclimates and the extent to which these factors operate in the context of the study in question. The discussions of the way human influences have been important reveal the full extent of the geographical understanding shown in the study. The work indicates an appreciation of the extent to which it is appropriate to reach any firm conclusions from the data that have been collected. The study also incorporates effectively a range of geographical skills and relevant statistical techniques. For example, there is discussion of the reasons why the selected transects may or may not give an accurate impression of the temperature gradients or wind speed measurements across the city, given the prevailing weather conditions. The study shows an appreciation of the way high and low pressure systems can distort findings at different times of the day and year. The findings are properly explained and suitable conclusions drawn. Similarly, the accompanying maps are carefully drawn, depicting temperature, wind speed and humidity changes across the city at well-chosen intervals. Again, there are comments on the significance of each of the maps used and, at appropriate points in the text, good reference is made to the information gathered by direct measurement. This gives the study added authority. In nearly all respects, the fieldwork has been completed well and the evidence used effectively. One of the most impressive features is the appreciation of the limitations of the database and the need for further study before more wide-reaching conclusions*

can be drawn. The computer is used to good effect, not least to present the maps, graphs and statistical data in a way which adds to the reader's understanding of the research undertaken.

#### *Middle-attaining student*

As with the first student, work is of a high standard, well thought out and carefully planned. The investigation is every bit as thorough as the first example but not as perceptive in the way evidence is used, nor does it show such a good understanding of how applicable any findings are to other contexts. For example, this student fails to appreciate fully the significance of the time of year when the measurements were taken and that the temperature gradient observed could be very different not only under different pressure systems but also at different times of the day. Too much of the evaluative comment is presented implicitly rather than explicitly. Little mention is made of how human activity as well as the size, shape and composition of the buildings in the city have influenced the outcomes observed. Good use is made of ICT to display map, graph and other diagrams to help the reader understand the significance of the main findings. The study shows a lively enthusiasm for the work which has been completed. Sometimes that enthusiasm leads to rather overstated conclusions: while not invalid, these reveal in places a degree of naivety and a lack of reading around the topic. This work is up to AS-level grade B standard.

#### *Lower-attaining student*

This student started the course with a grade D GCSE result. Work represents a clear improvement since then, but is nevertheless below the average for this stage of an AS course. It shows the student has moved from very simple explanations to attempting to develop these. There is some further analytical comment, but it is brief, disjointed and sometimes inaccurate. For example, the student fails to appreciate that most of the variations in temperature, humidity and wind speed found would not have occurred to anywhere near the same extent if the measurements were taken when a low pressure rather than high pressure system prevailed. The student has taken care to make all observations at the right time and in the right places. The data have also been carefully tabulated and maps accurately constructed. However, it is assumed the reader will draw most of the necessary conclusions without further comment. On one of the few occasions when an attempt is made to interpret the data, the student wrongly infers that the time of day when the measurements were taken is likely to play only a small part in explaining the variations noted in microclimate. The student over-uses line-graphs and bar-graphs and does not exploit as wide a range of statistical or graphical techniques as do the other two students.

The work suggests satisfactory achievement for this lower attaining student and very good achievement for the other two.

### **[Attainment above average (3)]**

#### **Commentary**

In general, these students show very good understanding of the key ideas and concepts, considering the point in the course when the work was done. Even the weakest student's work represents an improvement on the work of the previous year. It indicates satisfactory achievement, but below average attainment: there is not yet a big enough difference to show that the gap between GCSE and GCE standards has yet been confidently bridged. The other students' levels of understanding and progress in advanced skills, together with their effort and mature commitment to the work, indicate very good achievement.

#### **Example 2: evidence from analysis of work of one A-level geography student, in a school sixth form; predicted to achieve an AEA at distinction level.**

The student shows her very high level of understanding and all-round geographical competence by the way she undertook her individual study. She set herself the task of investigating whether there is a link between the quality of housing and the incidence of crime in two contrasting parts of Nottingham.

The student has shown independence of thought in selecting the topic in the first instance, as well as in the way she has shaped the main ideas to be tested through the information gathering. She was aware from the outset of what is required by the examiners to gain maximum marks and has set out systematically to undertake the study with these considerations uppermost. She has used advice from her teacher well to refine her data collection strategy, but she

*has made it clear that any guidance and support provided was being used critically as an opportunity to raise issues and discuss priorities rather than as a means of getting answers to awkward questions.*

*Through her research, she has shown a strong appreciation of the inter-relatedness of several geographical strands and themes, not least the links between the age of housing and the proximity to crime 'hot spots'. A particular strength is the way in which she has used fieldwork evidence. Not only is the study perceptively developed so that the reader can see where the evidence is pointing, but at regular intervals the integrity of the evidence is questioned and any limiting parameters recognised – for example, in the way the crime statistics have been collected and the extent to which non-geographical factors are relevant. The whole piece of writing has an impressive integrity which shows not only hard work and good organisation but clarity of thought and careful selection of evidence. The very well-argued, cogent conclusions do not take the findings beyond what the evidence allows.*

*In other areas of her work, the routine coursework files for example, there is ample evidence showing how her knowledge, understanding, geographical competencies and skills have all improved over the course. In most respects, her work was of a very good standard at the outset. Nonetheless, further improvement is evident. While her ideas were fluently expressed from the outset, her understanding of a number of issues has increased and she has formed well-considered views on most important topics and issues. These are invariably well supported by evidence, yet she remains aware of equally valid alternative perspectives.*

*The range of her reading is impressive and this has enabled her to develop a distinctive geographical voice. There are few areas of relative weakness. The student started the course with well above average GCSE grades, but this still represents good achievement.*

**[Attainment very high (1)]**

**Commentary**

The evidence shows that this student is producing work of a very high standard. You will set it alongside the evidence from other students when you decide how you judge attainment in the subject overall, but the evidence also shows that the school is making good provision to extend this student to her full ability.

**1.3 Talking with students**

Where possible, discuss the work with those students whose work you have analysed. Ask questions and raise matters that will yield as much evidence as possible on the students' standards of geographical knowledge, understanding and skills as well as their overall achievements to date.

**Example 3: evidence from a discussion with 3 second year A-level students in an FE college.**

**Fieldwork undertaken as part of their investigative study.**

*The students have selected very different geographical topics to investigate; two human and one physical. The studies centre on comparing environmental quality, considering the impact of tourism in an area, and a coastal erosion study.*

*All three have enjoyed this part of the course. They greatly appreciated the residential fieldwork in their AS-level course. This nurtured an interest in these aspects of the subject. The departmentally organised fieldwork has established good organisational and investigation procedures to follow, as well as due regard for health and safety issues.*

*Their attainment to date has varied, although all three look to be on target to achieve good marks for their work. In the best two studies, the initial hypotheses have been carefully worded. This enables the data collection to be used to compare and contrast one situation with another and to consider the factors that account for any similarities and differences. In the weakest study of the three, on tourism, too little thought has been given to how the information collected will relate to the initial hypotheses. As a result, this student is not clear how he will analyse his data or take the study forward and what type of statistical analysis can be applied.*

*In the two human studies, issues of ethnicity feature strongly. For example, in the study on environmental quality, comparisons between the ethnic composition of the areas studied emerges as a factor in the survey questioning local residents' perceptions of environmental quality. Both students have so far handled these issues in a balanced way, one noting that younger and older interviewees respond differently and that there are significant differences in perceptions between men and women. One student from a minority ethnic background has made a particularly valuable contribution based on her own experiences.*

**[Attainment varies from average (4) to above average (3)]**

### Commentary

The investigative studies are developing well, helped by previous fieldwork experience that provided a sound framework for them. Even the weakest of the three has used well-established methods for conducting geographical enquiry diligently, if unimaginatively, and his attainment is average. All three have identified hypotheses for themselves, and the extent to which they have done so has determined the success of their work so far. The students who have encountered issues of ethnicity handle them sensitively, recognising the dangers of stereotypical images. They use evidence well to support well-reasoned conclusions.

### 1.4 Lesson observation

You will also obtain evidence on standards and achievement from lesson observations. In classroom discussions, students' questions and responses to the teacher will show their depth of understanding. For practical aspects, further analysis of written work can be undertaken. You can observe students working on geographical answers to past questions and you can take advantage of opportunities to discuss their work with them.

**Example 4: evidence from a sixth-form college AS-level geography lesson.**

***Urban and rural settlements: pattern, process and change. The intended learning outcomes include requiring students to learn definitions of rural population and understand some of the causes and consequences of rural depopulation within the UK. The teacher has asked students to look up general definitions and then, working in small groups, to discuss push and pull factors which may affect areas experiencing rural depopulation.***

*All students in the group, including the lower attaining ones, can provide an accurate definition of rural depopulation. In response to teacher's questions, they identify not only the main push and pull factors but use the evidence provided on the maps and statistical data supplied to draw sensible inferences on the importance of these factors individually and collectively. Having discussed the issues that emerged among themselves and presented their thoughts to the whole group, the students each make good written notes which will serve them well later. The highest attaining students use the map evidence particularly well and clearly recognise the way the main factors are interrelated. Weaker students understand how each of the factors identified works, but some fail to see fully how these influences impact on one another. Nonetheless, major misunderstandings are few.*

*The very good presentation from two lower attaining students to the class shows that most of the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.*

*The progress in dealing with the demands of advanced work is indicative of very good achievement since GCSE and is supported by the level of commitment and involvement.*

**[Attainment well above average (2)]**



## 2 Teaching and learning

### 2.1 Evaluating teaching and learning

Interpret the *Handbook* criteria with specific reference to geography, and keep in mind the characteristics of effective teaching and learning, in which:

- through the teacher's knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject, students appreciate the way the study of geography helps them to make sense of their surroundings, whether they are in familiar or unfamiliar settings (*subject knowledge, expectations*);
- through carefully set work, clear explanations and correction of errors, the students are able to extend their geographical understanding and knowledge and develop their own distinctive insights into important geographical questions and problems (*planning, subject knowledge, expectations, assessment*);
- because of the teacher's high expectations, the students appreciate the importance of accurate definitions that enable them to describe and explain geographical patterns and processes well (*expectations, subject knowledge*);
- because of the teacher's good example and probing questioning, students understand how to undertake a geographical enquiry or piece of geographical fieldwork (*subject knowledge, methodology, expectations*);
- through a well-planned and skilfully presented curriculum, students show a real interest and work productively using geographical maps, photographs, texts, ICT and fieldwork evidence imaginatively (*subject knowledge, planning, expectations, resources, students apply intellectual effort, students show interest*);
- the students advance their knowledge and skills and develop their ideas by researching, investigating, discussing and writing about important environmental, human and physical aspects of the subject and recognise the important contribution geography can make to cross-curricular themes and key skills (*expectations, effort, pace of working*);
- the students increase their understanding through the teacher's stimulating use of fieldwork, geographical enquiry, role-play, geographical games and simulations (*methodology, resources*).

Be alert to teaching which may have superficially positive features but which lacks the rigour, depth, insight and knowledge which are the real basis of good subject teaching. Examples might be teaching in which:

- a geographical game or role play is used to generate interest in a new topic but few lessons are drawn from the activity, and its link to the topic being studied is questionable (*methodology, planning*);
- ICT is taught in a geographical context, but fails to increase geographical knowledge, skills or understanding (*resources, planning*);
- the pace is brisk but the students have too little opportunity to think, reflect or contribute (*methodology, expectations*);
- a fieldwork visit is planned but students are poorly briefed about its purpose and where it links to coursework or examination requirements (*planning, expectations*);
- students take care drawing maps and copying information, and expend effort downloading data from the Internet, but make too little use of the data they have accumulated (*methodology, expectations*).

## 2.2 Lesson observation

**Example 5: evidence from an AS lesson in an FE college; students are mostly aged 16–19 but two older students also attend (who have been out of education for several years).**

**Lesson on physical environments one term into the course, introducing students to the variations in stream characteristics which can be observed and measured as a river flows from its source to the point where it leaves the drainage basin.**

*The teacher has a good relationship with the students, who are all attentive and keen. She is a good geographer but has too little information about the group's previous knowledge of the topic. She has not discovered that some of the students in the group undertook a river study for their GCSE project in their last year at school. These students have a good working knowledge of this part of the course, much better than others. The lesson is planned on the assumption that all are starting from the same point and too little opportunity is given to students to show their previous understanding. For example, these students have all used flow meters, calculated cross-sectional areas and gained a good understanding of how meanders are formed. The other students, including the two older students, lack this knowledge and these skills.*

*The planning of the lesson has other significant weaknesses; most importantly the intended learning outcomes are too general and not sufficiently matched to the students' individual circumstances. The teacher relies unduly on a rather dated worksheet which was prepared by another teacher. This contains at least two significant errors which are not identified or corrected either by the teacher or by most of the class.*

*After an over-long introduction, the class is shown a video which raises a number of interesting questions about the behaviour of rivers after exceptional weather conditions. There is no pausing to note and consider the implications, so the significance of these points is lost, particularly for the weaker students.*

*To complete the lesson the teacher asks the class to read a relevant section from the textbook and to use the information gained so far to answer a past A-level question. No reference is made to what a good answer might look like. The students begin the work, but immediately start to ask for further guidance from the teacher. This is not provided, but the group is still required to finish the task as homework.*

**[Teaching and learning unsatisfactory (5)]**

### Commentary

Although the teacher shows good subject knowledge, she fails to match her teaching to the needs of the students. Because of differing previous experience, different students in the group have at this point different learning needs. The teacher does not find out whether or not differences are significant or allow those who have covered the work before to extend their understanding in further ways. Her failure to explain some issues which arise in the video and to give sufficiently clear guidance on what is needed mean that weaker students do not develop their understanding as much as they should.

**Example 6: evidence from a Year 12 AS-level lesson in a school sixth form.**

**Unit on human environments. The work is for a topic on settlement, to investigate the influence of physical factors on the initial siting and development of villages in Chilterns.**

*The teacher begins by reminding the class that many of them would have first studied this topic briefly as long ago as Year 8 and that subsequent settlement studies would have built upon this work. She explains that here they are wanting to investigate in much greater detail the impact of some of the main influences such as access to water, the local geology, the distribution of woodland and the impact that relief and drainage may have. She also explains where the work fits into the module before reminding the class what she expects them to learn during the lesson. As a result of this very thorough introduction the students have a good appreciation of what they ought to be learning in the lesson. A well-chosen task. Working in pairs, the class is asked to study the map extracts which have been provided. Each*



*pair is to focus on a different cluster of settlements and to make a rough sketch along the lines of the example already drawn on the board, showing the main features of the relief, drainage and settlement. They are then asked to make notes on any important features. After appropriate time has been allowed, the pairs each report on their findings to date. Their informal presentations show that the task has developed their understanding well.*

*There is next a useful exchange of information with several members of the group raising questions about the accuracy of the map, the significance of scale and what other sources of information might be helpful. The teacher ably identifies how they are to answer some of their own questions to develop the study further. She comments authoritatively on the importance of the local geology, referring to the geology map, and then asks each pair to add more detail to their sketches, in the light of recent discussions. They are then to comment on what this additional information adds to their understanding.*

*The learning is advanced at each point in the lesson by the teacher's well-chosen examples and by the expectation that students have to contribute to their own learning and to apply any previously acquired knowledge. The limitations of map evidence are discussed and this leads to a better appreciation of the need both for field observation and for making use of photographic evidence. When each pair has reported to the whole group, it becomes clear which students already have a good understanding and which need additional support and help. This is sensitively provided.*

*Good attention is given to ensuring that students use geographical terms accurately and that the reporting to the whole class reveals an understanding of the content that goes beyond describing facts and circumstances and involves some explanation.*

*The lesson ends with an informed yet reflective discussion on how they can use this case study to answer some of the aspects relevant to a recent examination question which is to be the homework task. The main points are outlined by the group on the board. Most students contribute well and in doing so show how far they have understood the major ideas the teacher has identified for the lesson.*

*There are minor shortcomings in the lesson. The teacher does not deal as well as she might have done with some of the less important misunderstandings which emerge from the paired group work. Two of the students do not contribute as much as the others, either to the work in pairs or to wider discussions and are, at times, content to let others do the work for them. A little more time could have been given to allowing students to make their evaluative comments, but this is still a very good lesson. The learning outcomes were carefully planned and achieved, the manner of delivery was lively and there were good opportunities to use and build upon previous knowledge in an intelligent manner.*

### **[Teaching and learning very good (2)]**

#### **Commentary**

Weaknesses are very minor in relation to the strengths. All students make significant gains in understanding and most leave the lesson with a far deeper appreciation of factors that impact on the site and situation of settlements in a given locality. Most can apply this knowledge to other areas and contexts.

#### **Example 7: evidence from a lesson in a school sixth form; a Year 13 A-level group of 24 students.**

##### **The impact of tourism on two small towns – one in Majorca and the other in the UK – for the unit on human systems.**

*The lesson is well planned in so far as the teacher has thought through what the students need to know in order to answer a specific examination question to be set for homework. He has structured the lesson activities to ensure that all members of the group will acquire a sound set of notes from which to answer the homework question. Some attention is given to ensuring that the students appreciate how far the two case study examples can be applied to other related questions and circumstances. The teacher demonstrates a good grasp of this aspect of the geography of tourism and takes care to ensure that the essential geographical context is properly developed. This is done by centring the case studies on map evidence, especially through well-chosen and up-to-date land-use maps which allow comparison with the land-use maps for these same towns at selected intervals in the past.*

*However, throughout the lesson the focus of the study is confined to a review of the economic impact of tourism on the two settlements. Other considerations, such as environmental, social and cultural, are given insufficient attention. No mention is made of eco-tourism.*

*The size of the group affects not only the style of delivery but also the quality of learning. The students are content to let the teacher do most of the work and also most, if not all, of the thinking. Given that this is a second-year group, they should be capable of undertaking such a study for themselves, either individually or collectively. Copied notes are taken and their replies to the occasional throw-away questions are weak. Some potentially significant misunderstandings are not followed up properly. Without further reading, which is neither suggested nor expected, the class on the basis of this lesson will be able to write answers only on the economic impact of tourism. Few will be able to write authoritatively from other perspectives.*

**[Teaching and learning unsatisfactory (5)]**

**Commentary**

Learning is unsatisfactory overall. Most students could have acquired the information and drawn the appropriate inferences for themselves. Several individual weaknesses and misunderstandings are not identified or corrected. Students are too passive, and even capable students fail to suggest that ecological, environmental, social and cultural factors are likely to have a significant impact on economic influences that form the central focus to the lesson. The size of the class makes it more difficult both for students to ask relevant questions and for the teacher to appreciate how far the intended learning outcomes have in fact been achieved. The teaching does have a number of strengths – the lesson is carefully planned and the teacher ensures that all students have a sound set of notes from which to answer an A-level question on an important strand of the geography of tourism. However, the teacher does not have a strategy for finding out how much the students are learning or for countering their passive attitude.

**Example 8: evidence from a Year 13 A-level lesson in a school sixth form; 17 students present.**

***The impact of transnational corporations on transport patterns on a variety of scales: global, national and regional.***

*The teaching is authoritative and uses well-chosen examples to engage the minds of the group. All students leave the lesson well placed to apply the information provided and use the principles discussed to develop a case study for themselves. Attention is given to ensuring that terms such as 'transnational corporation' are accurately defined and that students approach their own studies from a geographical rather than an economic standpoint. Shortcomings in the teaching include too much information for most students to digest in the lesson and too little time to read and reflect upon it. As a result, three of the weakest students could easily be overwhelmed, and they are less well placed than the rest to develop a high-quality case study for themselves.*

*All students listen and contribute when allowed to do so. While it is clear that some of the more complex information is not being understood, the students are not overwhelmed. Copious notes are taken, most of good quality, and there are indications that many of the students intend to follow up in private study the points which they have not understood during the lesson. Good questions are asked by students of all abilities, showing how they have drawn appropriate inferences and grasped the most important ideas. Insufficient time is provided to answer some of the questions of the weakest students and many of these will need to be followed up later. Yet, even so, these students show a very mature attitude and are not discouraged. The relatively large group size restricts the amount of time the students and the teacher have for one-to-one discussions to enhance the learning that takes place in the lesson.*

**[Teaching satisfactory (4); learning good (3)]**

### Commentary

The teaching is satisfactory overall – it has weaknesses but these are outweighed by the strengths. All students benefit from the information provided and the clear explanations of the most important concepts. Even the weakest students ask sensible questions during the lesson and develop their understanding. On the other hand, the teacher's management of time is not as good as it should be. He spends time giving more information than students can reasonably be expected to digest and does not find time to deal with some of the misunderstandings of the weaker students.

Despite the weaknesses in the teaching, the mature attitude of the students makes the learning good. Students respond very sensibly to having so much information put before them and, while the least capable will probably need further help to develop a good case study for themselves, all have made good progress in their understanding.

### 2.3 Other evidence on teaching and learning

Lesson observation is usually the most important source of evidence on the quality of teaching and learning, but the analysis of work and discussions with students can also yield valuable information. This is particularly important when the work includes a coursework component undertaken over time. Under these circumstances, the observation of individual lessons may give a very partial picture of the students' learning experiences and of the support provided by teachers.

The work analysis will give you a good feel for the overall rate of progress, and, therefore, the pace of the teaching and learning. It will show the range and depth of the work which the students are required to do. For example, it will show whether students have developed the ability to apply lessons they have learnt from case studies to less familiar contexts. It will also reveal how far their own geographical insights and perspectives have developed over the course and whether or not they have been taught to see important connections and linkages in questions and problems. It will allow you to judge whether teachers have struck the right balance between description and analysis and evaluation.

Discussions with students will give you a sense of their motivation and the range of their experiences. You can ask questions to show whether they understand clearly how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.



### 3 Other factors affecting quality

Other factors are only significant if they have a noticeable impact on standards, teaching and learning. Note and evaluate any significant features of the curriculum, leadership, management, staffing, accommodation or resources. The following are examples of considerations specific to geography.

#### Curriculum and management

A-level geography courses should be developing and applying geographical knowledge, understanding and skills and you should judge whether a proper balance is achieved overall. This may not be an easy judgement to reach because geography will commonly be taught in a modular format, and in any one module it may not be possible to achieve a suitable balance between knowledge and skills. You should take an overview from the pattern of modules being studied.

Consider whether there are any relative weaknesses in teachers' knowledge of the subject; chief examiners at A level have often commented on the lower standard of answers to questions on physical geography, compared with answers to human geography questions. Are students achieving lower standards in one or more modules because of such weaknesses?

The essentially synoptic nature of geography, and the connections that need to be made between the many aspects of the subject, often make it less well suited to modular arrangements than some other subjects. Difficulties can be kept to a minimum by good curriculum planning and the careful sequencing of topics. Modular specifications in geography tend to emphasise or sharpen the boundaries between interrelated geographical components. Teachers need to recognise this to make the links clear to students. The scheme of work, which should always be more than just the specifications and a timetable for covering them, may show what steps have been taken. The synoptic unit, taught at the end of the course, encourages teachers to emphasise linkages and connections within the subject. There should be opportunities to reinforce the importance of synthesis, connectivity and holism in the way topics are taught. Consider whether there is evidence that the quality of students' experience of fieldwork is affecting their learning and the standards they are achieving.

#### Resources

Consider whether the quality of work is affected by students' lack of access to resources, or by the quality of resources. Can all students afford to attend a fieldwork course? How are students supported if they cannot afford to attend? Are any costs known when students choose their courses? Do students have to buy textbooks or other vital resources such as maps and atlases? Do students and teachers have access to recent publications from the Geographical Association or the Royal Geographical Society? Do students benefit from extra-curricular opportunities such as outside lectures?

How up to date are the textbooks and case study materials selected by the teacher? What resources are used and encouraged by teachers? Are any more than five years old and, if so, are any evaluative comments based on this information still valid?

#### Accommodation

Using non-specialist rooms can seriously constrain teaching and learning if, for example, there is no access to sinks when soils are taught, or there is no access to ICT at some points in the course when such resources are necessary. Consider how learning is affected by the quality of the accommodation. Is there sufficient space for practical work?



## 4 Writing the report

The following is an example of a post-16 subject section from an inspection report for a medium-sized sixth-form college. (It does not necessarily reflect the judgements in any or all of the examples given elsewhere in this booklet.) The summative judgements in these reports use, for schools, the seven-point scale: *excellent*; *very good*; *good*; *satisfactory*; *unsatisfactory*; *poor*; *very poor*. For colleges, there is the five-point scale: *outstanding*; *good*; *satisfactory*; *unsatisfactory*; *very weak*. The summative judgements *excellent/very good* used in school reports correspond to *outstanding* in colleges; *poor/very poor* used in schools correspond to *very weak* in colleges.

### Geography

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **good**.

#### Strengths

- Standards on the A-level course are above average.
- Students achieve well; their practical and fieldwork assignments are of a high standard.
- Teaching and learning are good; teachers have good knowledge of the subject and lessons have a clear structure.
- The subject is well led and there is good monitoring of the progress of particular groups of students.

#### Areas for improvement

- The retention rate on the AS-level course is below average.
- There is over-reliance on note-taking in some lessons.

#### Scope of provision

The provision in geography caters for some 100 students following AS and A-level courses. High-ability students are entered for the Advanced Extension Award (AEA). A GCSE geography course, intended for those students who wished to improve their grades from school, was offered this year, but it failed to recruit sufficient numbers to run.

#### Standards and achievement

Standards overall are above average. The most recent GCE A-level examination results were well above average. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade, and over three-quarters of a large cohort of 44 gained the highest grades, A and B. The AS-level examination results were good, all except one student gaining at least a pass grade. However, the retention rate on the AS-level course is below average. Five out of seven students who started the course with a grade C in GCSE did not complete the course. Among second-year students, there was a close match between their AS grades and their A-level results. Seven students were entered for the AEA including three from minority ethnic backgrounds: four gained a distinction and three a merit grade. There were no significant differences in the standards attained by students of different gender or ethnicity.

The observation of students in lessons and an analysis of samples of their work confirm that the standards achieved by students on AS and A-level courses are above average. They are better than at the time of the last inspection. Since the students started on the courses with average levels of GCSE attainment, these standards represent good achievement. The very high results in the most recent A-level examination were due, at least in part, to the higher than usual ability of that particular year group.

Students show good knowledge and understanding of introductory topics both in physical and in human geography. They work with confidence on their own, collect information from a variety of sources and form sound judgements from the data. Their map work and their ability to make use of photographic evidence are very good. Students use these skills appropriately to support their practical and fieldwork assignments, which are of a consistently high standard. Only a few students have used the Internet but they have done so well, questioning the accuracy and reliability of the data they downloaded.

### Quality of education

Overall, teaching is good. Lessons have a clear structure. Resources, whether in the form of text, ICT, maps or the students' existing knowledge, are used very effectively. All teachers show good subject knowledge, not only through what they say, but also in how they monitor students' learning and give effective support to slower learners. Extended pieces of writing are regularly marked and students are given clear and accurate judgements on the quality of their work, which helps them to improve it. In one first-year lesson, students were being guided on how to conduct their own fieldwork study. The teacher encouraged the class to work in pairs to devise some hypotheses to test. She discussed with the students their first efforts and suggested how each could be improved, but did not substitute her ideas for those of the students. A weakness in the teaching is that, in some lessons, students tend to make too many notes and are less actively involved in their learning than they should be. They could be taught to be more selective.

Students learn well. They are attentive and work effectively, in response to the good quality of the teaching. Most students can talk authoritatively on the aspects of the course they have studied. They use resources well and enjoy the practical and fieldwork assignments and related activities, benefiting greatly from them. There is a growth in geographical maturity both in oral work and in the writing between the first and second years of the A-level course. A group of second-year A-level students challenged the usefulness of textbook examples of urban land-use models. They used their own fieldwork data to suggest a more realistic model, which they considered took better account of the dynamics of urban change. The teachers provide additional support for students through voluntary workshop sessions, but these are not well attended by the students who most need help.

### Leadership and management

Work in the subject is led and managed well. The good sequencing of topics and themes in the new scheme of work and the up-to-date nature of the case studies contribute significantly to teaching and learning. Target-setting for students is taken seriously and undertaken well. The relative performance of male and female students is monitored, as is the performance of students from minority ethnic groups. However, as yet, no one teacher has taught all of the units of the A-level course, so that each teacher's overview of a student's progress is partial. There are satisfactory stocks of reference materials held within the department and in the learning centre. Regular meetings enable teachers to compare their experiences of the new A-level units and help them to share best practice in teaching.









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