



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



*Rewarding Learning*

# GCSE subject criteria for geography

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# Contents

Introduction .....	3
Aims and learning outcomes .....	3
Subject content .....	4
Assessment objectives .....	6
Scheme of assessment .....	6
Grade descriptions .....	6

## Introduction

1. GCSE subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all GCSE specifications in geography. They provide the framework within which an awarding body creates the detail of the specification.
2. Specifications must also meet the regulators' general requirements, including the common and GCSE criteria as defined in *The statutory regulation of external qualifications* (QCA/04/1293).
3. Subject criteria are intended to:
  - help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies
  - ensure that the rigour of GCSE is maintained
  - ensure that specifications build on the knowledge, understanding and skills established by the national curricula for England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and facilitate progression to higher level qualifications in geography
  - help higher education institutions, employers and other stakeholders such as learners and parents/guardians know what has been studied and assessed.
4. Any GCSE specification that contains significant elements of geography must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

## Aims and learning outcomes

5. GCSE specifications in geography should encourage learners to be inspired, moved and changed by following a broad, coherent, satisfying and worthwhile course of study and gain an insight into related sectors. They should prepare learners to make informed decisions about further learning opportunities and career choices.
6. GCSE specifications in geography must enable learners to:
  - actively engage in the process of geography to develop as effective and independent learners, and as critical and reflective thinkers with enquiring minds
  - develop their knowledge and understanding of geographical concepts and appreciate the relevance of these concepts to our changing world

- develop a framework of spatial awareness in which to appreciate the importance of the location of places and environments from local to global
- appreciate the differences and similarities between people's views of the world, its environments, societies and cultures
- understand the significance of values and attitudes to the development and resolution of issues
- develop their responsibilities as global citizens and recognise how they can contribute to a future that is sustainable and inclusive
- develop and apply their learning to the real world through fieldwork and other out of classroom learning
- use geographical skills, appropriate technologies, enquiry and analysis.

## **Subject content**

7. The content of GCSE specifications in geography must reflect the learning outcomes.
8. GCSE specifications in geography must allow students to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding specified below.
9. Specifications must include a rationale for the geographical approach adopted, whether place, issue, theme, people-environment based
10. GCSE specifications in geography must require learners to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:
  - new ideas and approaches to the study of geography in the 21st century
  - the importance of geographical location
  - a range of places, at local, regional, national and international scales selected from the UK, other parts of Europe and other continents, to include places at different levels of development
  - aspects of physical and human geography, and their associated processes, including relationships between people and environments

- current issues of local, national and global importance, including climate change and sustainable development
- the importance of fieldwork and out of classroom learning
- the use of new technologies including GIS, to assist geographical investigation
- geographical concepts and ideas including uneven development and alternative futures
- the relevance of geographical studies to their lives and to the real world.

11. GCSE specifications in geography must require learners to:

- identify relevant geographical questions and issues, and establish appropriate sequences of investigation incorporating geographical skills, including enquiry skills
- carry out fieldwork and out of classroom learning
- use new technologies, including GIS, to assist geographical investigation
- extract and interpret information from a range of sources, including field observations, maps (including Ordnance Survey maps of different scales) drawings, photographs (ground, aerial and satellite imagery) diagrams and tables.
- acquire and use geographical vocabulary
- communicate in a variety of ways including extended writing and graphical forms
- make informed geographical decisions
- describe, analyse and interpret evidence, making decisions, drawing and justifying conclusions, and communicating findings in ways appropriate to the task audience
- evaluate methods of collecting, presenting and analysing evidence, and the validity and limitations of evidence and conclusions.

## Assessment objectives

12. All specifications must require candidates to demonstrate their ability to:

<b>Assessment objectives</b>		<b>% weighting</b>
AO1	Recall, select, and communicate their knowledge and understanding of places, environments and concepts	30–40
AO2	Apply their knowledge and understanding in familiar and unfamiliar contexts	30–40
AO3	Select and use a variety of skills, techniques and technologies to investigate, analyse and evaluate questions and issues	30–40

## Scheme of assessment

13. Each scheme of assessment must include assessment of the learner's experience of fieldwork.
14. GCSE specifications in geography must allocate a weighting of 75% to external assessment and a weighting of 25% to controlled assessment in the overall scheme of assessment.
15. Question papers in geography must be targeted at either Foundation or Higher tier.

## Grade descriptions

16. Grade descriptions are provided to give a general indication of the standards of achievement likely to have been shown by candidates awarded particular grades. The descriptions must be interpreted in relation to the content in the specification; they are not designed to define that content.

17. The grade awarded will depend in practice upon the extent to which the candidate has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of candidates' performance in the assessment may be balanced by better performances in others.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Description</b>
A	<p>Candidates recall, select and communicate detailed knowledge and thorough understanding of places, environments, concepts and locations at a range of scales. They use geographical terminology accurately and appropriately.</p> <p>They apply appropriate knowledge and understanding of a wide range of geographical concepts, processes and patterns in a variety of both familiar and unfamiliar physical and human contexts. They recognise and understand complex relationships between people and the environment, identifying and evaluating current problems and issues, and making perceptive and informed geographical decisions. They understand how these can contribute to a future that is sustainable.</p> <p>They select, evaluate and use effectively a wide range of relevant skills and appropriate techniques and technologies. They identify relevant questions and issues and establish appropriate sequences to undertake investigations independently. They collect and record accurately a range of appropriate evidence from a wide range of sources, including fieldwork. They analyse and interpret information and critically evaluate its validity. They reflect on the limitations of evidence, detecting and responding to bias to make informed and reasoned judgements to present substantiated and appropriate conclusions.</p>

C	<p>Candidates recall, select and communicate knowledge and understanding of places, environments, concepts and locations across different scales. They use geographical terminology appropriately.</p> <p>They apply their knowledge and understanding of geographical concepts, processes and patterns in a variety of both familiar and unfamiliar physical and human contexts. They understand relationships between people and the environment, identifying and explaining different problems and issues and making geographical decisions that are supported by reasons, including sustainable approaches.</p> <p>They select and use a variety of skills, and appropriate techniques and technologies to identify questions and issues to undertake investigations. They collect and record appropriate evidence from different sources, including fieldwork. They analyse and interpret evidence and recognise some of the limitations of evidence to reach plausible conclusions.</p>
F	<p>Candidates recall, select and communicate knowledge and some limited aspects of understanding about places, environments and concepts at more than one scale. They communicate their ideas using everyday language.</p> <p>They apply their understanding of some simple physical and human processes and patterns in different contexts. They recognise simple relationships between people and the environment. They identify problems and issues and make decisions informed by simple reasons and evidence.</p> <p>They use skills and a limited number of techniques and technologies to undertake an investigation. They collect and record a limited selection of evidence from some sources, including fieldwork. They interpret evidence to reach some basic conclusions.</p>