



Department
for Education

Geography

**GCSE subject content and assessment
objectives**

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Introduction

GCSE subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject. They provide the framework within which awarding organisations create the detail of their specifications, so ensuring progression from key stage 3 national curriculum requirements and the possibilities for development into A level.

Subject aims and learning outcomes

GCSE specifications in geography should provide the opportunity for students understand more about the world and their place within it. The GCSE course will deepen understanding of geographical processes, illuminating the impact of change and of complex people-environment interactions, recognising the dynamic links and inter-relationships between places and environments at different scales, and developing students' competence in using a wide range of geographical investigative skills and approaches.

GCSE specifications in geography should enable students to:

- develop and extend their *knowledge* of locations, places, environments and processes, and of different scales and social, political and cultural contexts (*know geographical material*)
- gain *understanding* of the interactions between people and environments, change in places and processes over space and time, and the interrelationship between geographical phenomena at different scales and in different contexts (*think like a geographer*)
- develop and extend their competence in a range of *skills* including those used in fieldwork, in using maps and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and in researching secondary evidence, including digital sources; and apply the cycle of collecting, presenting and analysing (geographical) data, including categorising and evaluating information and hypotheses (*study like a geographer*)
- *apply* geographical knowledge, understanding, skills and approaches appropriately and creatively to real world contexts, including fieldwork, and to contemporary situations and issues; and develop well-evidenced geographical argument drawing on their knowledge and understanding. (*understand the application of geography*).

Subject content

GCSE specifications in geography should reflect the aims and learning outcomes outlined above, and should include the knowledge, understanding and skills listed below, giving due consideration to the assessment objectives. The essential subject content outlined here provides the framework for developing a coherent study at GCSE.

This content sets out the full range of content for GCSE specifications in geography. Awarding organisations may, however, use any flexibility to increase depth, breadth or context within the specified topics or to consolidate teaching of the subject content.

Scope of study

GCSE specifications in geography should require students to study:

Location knowledge

Locational knowledge and context – building on key stage 3 *knowledge of the world's continents, countries, regions and their physical, environmental and human features* to include:

- appreciation of different spatial, cultural and political contexts
- recognition of important links and inter-relationships between places and environments at local, regional, national and international scales
- more detailed contextual knowledge of two countries of contemporary global significance, in addition to the UK.¹

Place knowledge

Geography of the UK – in-depth knowledge and understanding of the UK's geography to include its physical and human landscapes, environmental challenges, changing economy and society, the importance of cultural and political factors, and its relationships with the wider world.

¹The selection of countries/regions should be made to link directly with other subject criteria (for example, ecosystems, cities, global economic development) and should ensure progress from, rather than direct repetition of, key stage 3 geography content.

Physical geography: processes and change

Geomorphic processes and landscape – How geomorphic processes (e.g. weathering, slope movement and erosion by water, wind and ice) have influenced and continue to influence the landscapes of the UK and the interaction of those processes with human activity. This should include detailed reference to some distinctive physical landscapes in the UK (e.g. chalk, limestone, glacial, coastal deposition, river valley).

Changing weather and climate – The causes, consequences of and responses to extreme weather conditions and natural weather hazards, together with their changing distribution in time and space. The spatial and temporal characteristics, evidence for and causes of climatic change over the past two million years to the present day.

People and environment: processes and interactions

Global ecosystems – An overview of the distribution and characteristics of large scale natural global ecosystems (such as tundra, rainforest and temperate forest), drawing out the interdependence of climate, soil, water, plants, animals and humans and the issues related to sustainable use and management.

Resource management and biodiversity - How humans use, modify and change natural ecosystems in ways that may be sustainable or unsustainable. At least three specific examples at local and regional scales should be chosen to illustrate how this may lead to beneficial (e.g. agriculture and food production, identifying new energy resources) and/or detrimental outcomes (e.g. desertification, loss of biodiversity, soil degradation) for human well-being.

Human geography: processes and change

Cities and urban society in the 21st century – The causes and effects of rapid urbanisation and contrasting urban trends in different parts of the world with varying characteristics of economic and social development. In addition, two case study cities should be chosen to examine ways of life and contemporary challenges arising from and influencing urban change in at least one major city in an economically advanced country, and one major city in a poorer county or recently emerging economy.² City studies should be set within the context of their region, country and the wider world, including an understanding of the causes and impacts of national and international migration on the growth and character of these cities.

² The so-called BRIC countries may be included in this. BRIC is a grouping acronym that refers to the countries of Brazil, Russia, India and China, which are all deemed to be at a similar stage of newly advanced economic development.

Global economic development issues – The causes and consequences of uneven development at global level as the background for considering the changing context of population, economy and society and of technological and political development in at least one poorer country or one that is within a newly emerging economy.³ This country study should include examination of the wider political, social and environmental context within which the country is placed, the changing nature of industry and investment, and the characteristics of international trade, aid and geo-political relationships with respect to that country.

Maps, fieldwork and geographical skills

GCSE specifications should require students to develop and demonstrate:

Maps

The use of a range of *maps*, atlases, Ordnance Survey maps, satellite imagery and other graphic and digital material, including the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS), to obtain, illustrate, analyse and evaluate geographic information. To include making maps and sketches to present and interpret geographical information.

Fieldwork

Different approaches to *fieldwork* undertaken in at least two contrasting environments in order to explore physical and human processes and the interactions between them (e.g. city street, beach, woodland, suburban estate, moorland edge). This should involve the collection of primary physical and human data.

Use of data

The collection, interpretation, analysis, presentation, application and evaluation of *primary and secondary data*. This should include: fieldwork data; GIS material; library and digital sources; visual and graphical data; and numerical and statistical information.

Geographical argument

A requirement for students to *write descriptively, analytically and critically, to communicate their ideas effectively, to develop an extended written argument, and to draw well-evidenced and informed conclusions about geographical questions and issues.*

³ (as above in footnote 2).

Assessment objectives

	Assessment objectives	Weighting
AO1	<p><i>Knowledge:</i> recall, select and demonstrate knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ locations, distributions and contextual background ▪ places, environments and a wide range of processes including human actions that influence people's relationships with the environment ▪ scale (e.g. local, regional, global) and time (e.g. geologic, historic, present, future) and their importance when considering locations, contexts, places and environments. 	20-30%
AO2	<p><i>Understanding:</i> show understanding of :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the changes which occur through time in places, environments and processes ▪ the interrelationships between people and environment ▪ the interconnections between places at different scales and in different contexts. 	20-30%
AO3	<p><i>Skills:</i> know about, select, adapt and use a variety of skills, techniques and technologies, including those related to fieldwork methods, maps, GIS, visual, graphic and numerical data, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ observe, collect, organise, and present data ▪ investigate, analyse and interpret data ▪ explain and communicate geographical evidence, ideas and questions. 	20-30% (Of which skills used to respond to fieldwork data and contexts should represent 5% of the total)
AO4	<p><i>Application:</i> apply geographical knowledge, understanding and skills in order to answer geographical questions, evaluate contemporary situations, make well-evidenced judgements and decisions, understand different perspectives, and construct sound geographical arguments in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ questions and issues about familiar places, landscapes and environments (i.e. those studied in their GCSE course) ▪ questions and issues about places, landscapes and 	30-40% (Of which application to fieldwork context(s) should represent 10% of the total)

	<p>environments that are unfamiliar (i.e. not specified in the GCSE course)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ questions and issues arising directly from real fieldwork contexts. 	
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Assessment of fieldwork

- *Geographical fieldwork may be defined* as the experience of understanding and applying specific geographical knowledge, understanding and skills to a particular and real out-of-classroom context. In undertaking fieldwork, students practise a range of skills, gain new geographical insights and begin to appreciate different perspectives on the world around them. Fieldwork is crucial to the strong role envisaged for geography in the revised and more challenging curriculum at all levels and so should be assessed within GCSE geography
- The scheme of assessment should include an identifiable element or elements assessing fieldwork and this will be externally assessed and comprise 15% of the total weighting (of which 5% is allocated to skills and 10% allocated to application)
- The following areas of knowledge, skills and understanding should be assessed through the fieldwork questions/tasks in the final examination paper(s):
 - i. understanding of the kinds of question capable of being investigated through fieldwork and an understanding of the geographical enquiry processes appropriate to investigate these
 - ii. understanding of the range of techniques and methods used in fieldwork (e.g. observation, sampling, counting, measurement, interviewing)
 - iii. processing and presenting fieldwork data (e.g. various kinds of graph, maps, diagrams)
 - iv. analysing and explaining data collected in the field using knowledge of relevant geographical case studies and theories
 - v. drawing evidenced conclusions and summaries from exemplary fieldwork transcripts and data
 - vi. reflecting critically on fieldwork data, methods used, conclusions drawn and knowledge gained.

Note that (i), (ii) and (iii) will draw heavily on AO3 Skills whilst (iv), (v) and (vi) will draw predominantly on AO4 Application.



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