

GCSE Controlled Assessments

Introduction

These notes aim to provide information and ideas that relate to the new system of Controlled Assessments (CAs) that relate to GCSE courses in geography. The notes are mainly focused on regulations concerning enquiry work that is associated with fieldwork, accepting that CA regulations also apply to other types of assessment.

Throughout this document, reference is made to selected Exam Board Specifications (OCR Spec. B, Edexcel Spec. B, AQA Spec. B, WJEC Spec. A). There is no intention to compare and make judgements about the respective qualities of each specification. Instead, they have been used to provide illustrative details so that wider questions can be raised and discussed. It has been necessary to take extracts from these Specifications out of their full context. It is, therefore, essential, that teachers direct specific questions to their Exam Board where further clarity is needed.

The notes prompt questions with regard to how some regulations might be interpreted and implemented. It can sometimes help interpret the statements by one Exam Board by reading how it is explained by another – the core regulations over CA conditions are supposed to be identical! The notes, therefore, review the regulations across the Exam Boards so that teachers can be aware of both similarities and on occasions, some differences. This may have special relevance in schools where students take specifications from several different Exam Boards and where confusion may arise if differences are perceived to exist. In this situation, it is essential that schools and not just departments ensure that they produce their own policies and practices so that the new regulations can be implemented in a coherent and well managed manner.

Background to change

The background to CAs is best understood with reference to the key issues to be addressed as initially set out by QCA to bring about change from previous regulations and procedures that related to the variety of practices under the name 'coursework'. These key issues were listed as follows.

- Making assessments more valid and reliable
- Avoiding assessments that are too formulaic and predictable
- Supporting good teaching and learning
- Making assessment more manageable for students and teachers
- Discouraging and detecting assessment malpractice
- Allowing teachers to confidently authenticate students' work
- Ensuring judgements are of highest quality.

These key issues can be regarded as aims to be achieved by the new system. They are aims to which everyone can probably subscribe. It is already clear that the new system has much to offer in order to achieve several of these aims and as such, teachers, students and parents are likely to welcome these changes. Whether all the aims are capable of being achieved by the new system, however, may present some challenges.

Assessment objectives (with % weighting)

QCA's generic regulations provide a common framework of assessment objectives for all GCSE geography courses. A weighting of 25% of the final mark is to be awarded to work done under controlled assessment conditions for every GCSE geography award.

- 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

The following skills must be assessed through controlled assessment in the context of fieldwork:

- identifying, analysing and evaluating geographical questions and issues
- establishing appropriate sequences of investigation incorporating geographical skills, including enquiry skills
- extracting and interpreting information from a range of different sources
- evaluating methods of collecting, presenting and analysing evidence, and the validity and limitations of evidence and conclusions.

QCA February 2008

It is not, however, clear as to whether this framework applies to the GCSE qualification as a whole, or because of the context of the document, specifically to the Controlled Assessment component. One Exam Board, for example (WJEC) uses the same categories but has different marks and weightings (AO1 5%, AO2 10%, AO3 10%) for their CA work. Another (Edexcel) has weightings for the CA component (Unit 4), that are quite different (AO1 3%, AO2 6%, AO3 16%). Teachers need to follow the regulations as set out by their Exam Boards in the knowledge that the courses have been approved as being valid. The WJEC with two CA tasks that are worth different totals, have different breakdowns of marks for each task (*Task 1 AO1 2%, AO2 3%, AO3 5% and Task 2 AO1 3%, AO2 7%, AO3 5%*).

It is also worth noting that the generic regulations appear to require that it is the student who must take the initiative in decisions over what to do and how to do it. They should, for example, 'select' the skills to use, rather than skills being selected for them by the teacher. They should also establish appropriate sequences of investigation, rather than this being laid out for them. There is a conundrum here in that what might be seen as the tight structure of an investigation/enquiry and the detailed marking criteria tend to act against providing opportunities for the student to demonstrate their own abilities in these aspects of the work.

Phases of control

The three phases of control as applicable to CAs are set out for all GCSE examinations as follows:

- Task setting
- Task taking (sub-divided into Research/data collection and Analysis/conclusions)
- Task marking.

This structure provides a common format within which the Exam Boards present their regulations. It is, however, the case that each Exam Board has had the flexibility to write the regulations in their own way, even those regulations that are set out as being generic by QCA. Teachers need to be aware that what may appear to be differences in regulations may be little more than differences in wording. They will also need to be alert to regulations that are clearly different (of which further details will be outlined below). A more difficult category of difference can be in regulations that one Exam Board explains in greater detail than another. In some cases,

supplementary documents and Inset work has clarified the interpretation of regulations that appear in the original specifications. Where there is any doubt as to the interpretation of regulations, teachers need to contact their Exam Board directly for clarification.

Levels of control

The QCA regulations (February 2008) identify three levels of control for different phases of CAs, i.e. High (formal), Medium (informal), Low (limited). The word 'supervision' is used to cover all forms of control.

- High control applies to the Task Setting in that the Tasks are set by the Exam Board, though they can be contextualised by a school (teacher), and in some cases, also adapted by a student.
- High control also applies to the parts of student Task Taking that involves *Analysis and Evaluation* (QCA).
- The Medium category only applies to the Task Marking phase in Exam Board documents, though the original QCA document has provision for it to also apply to earlier stages where the task is outlined and resources are used.
- Limited control applies to parts of the student Task Taking that involves *Research/data collection* (QCA).

One Exam Board (AQA), however, has further refined this basic list by introducing additional stages, i.e. '*preparation*', '*planning*', '*processing*', '*presentation*' (omitting *data collection*) as being under Limited control, as well as '*describe*' and '*interpretation*' that applies to High control. Teachers will need to consider whether these additional words are appropriate for the specification they are taking and whether they should be under Limited or High control – some, for example, may consider that 'description' could be linked to presentation as an activity that could be under Limited control.

Aspects of control

QCA's generic regulations set out a framework within which different levels of control can be identified.

- Authenticity control – Exam Boards define the assessment conditions to ensure that the work is produced by the students under comparable regulations
- Feedback control – Exam Board regulations as to the type and amount of what is described as 'guidance' or 'support' by teachers and how any such guidance is recorded
- Time control – guidance is provided in Exam Board regulations, but schools make decisions about what is appropriate
- Collaboration control – collaborative work is permissible but individual work must be identifiable
- Resource control – access to resources as permitted by the school

CA Units

The Exam Boards allocate a Unit within their specifications to tasks that are assessed through CA conditions. While all conform to QCA's 25% generic regulation, there are some differences of detail between them.

- Edexcel: Unit 4 Researching Geography – one task (2000 words)
- AQA: Unit 4 Local investigation including fieldwork – one task (2000 words)
- OCR: Unit (code) with two tasks -
Fieldwork focus (1200 words) and Geographical Investigation (800 words)

- WJEC; Unit 3 Geographical Enquiry with two tasks- Fieldwork (10%) and Problem solving DME (15%) –no word counts are mentioned.

QCA generic regulations state that: 'For specifications with a weighting of 25% controlled assessment, there must be just one controlled assessment unit/component, which is moderated and awarded as a single entity'. QCA provide the following definitions of the various terms that are involved.

- *Unit: The smallest part of a qualification that is formally reported and can be separately certificated. A unit may contain separately assessed components.*
- *Component: A discrete and assessable element within a controlled assessment or qualification that is not itself formally reported, where the awarding body records the marks.*
- *Task: A discrete element of external or controlled assessment that may include examinations, assignments, practical activities and projects.*

Within these definitions, it is unclear how two of the Exam Boards are able to provide for two separate tasks that are separately marked. The specifications, however, been approved.

Choice of titles

The Exam Boards release titles for the CA components in advance on a two year cycle. The intention is that these titles are to be 'contextualised' by schools to meet local conditions. The titles provide topics with a particular aspect to investigate. An example (Edexcel A) states: *How effective is the coastal management at your chosen location?* The number of titles from which to choose varies between the Exam Boards.

Although the number of titles ought to be sufficient to enable choices to be made, this may be problematic when the work involves fieldwork. A title that includes coastal fieldwork, for example, may not be a realistic option for many schools.

The extent to which the title as supplied by the Exam Board can be adapted ('contextualised') is a matter that may need some clarification. One Exam Board (OCR) states that *'While the wording must remain unchanged, these tasks can be contextualised so that they allow the usage of local resources available to any centre.'*

The question of exactly who makes the choice of final titles is also one to consider, i.e. whether this is done by the teacher or the student. Although there is considerable convenience in ensuring that all students undertake the same work, an alternative viewpoint is that students can produce the highest quality work when they have a greater ownership of what they are doing, perhaps brought about by engaging with a topic in which they have a particular interest or that may be of immediate relevance to where they live. The freedom to do this is, to a large extent, pre-determined by the Exam Board's titles, but there may still be opportunities for some degree of personalisation by the student.

One Exam Board (WJEC) states that *'It is permissible for the teacher to set all candidates the same task or alternatively candidates, with teacher guidance, can choose one from the list available'*. Another (AQA) states that *'Students choose one option from the Local Fieldwork Investigation'*. Another (OCR) states that *'Controlled Assessment tasks must be contextualised by centres'*, the implication being that it is the teachers and not the student who is expected to make the final choice of wording. Interpreting the regulations literally may not be what is intended in practice. It is

apparent in all Exam Board guidance, for example, that a student can be strongly guided in the early stages of a CA and that this can include guidance on the focus of the title for the task.

The question of who makes the choice also needs to be considered against the marking criteria for the work. The same question is relevant when considering the amount of direction that can be given with regard to several other stages in the work, e.g. to the planning and the fieldwork techniques that are used.

Some wording in the regulations may appear to be ambiguous, for example, one Exam Board (Edexcel) states as part of the marking objectives that '*Students are to identify, analyse and evaluate geographical questions and issues*'. One could interpret this to mean that it is the student who must 'identify' the question and issues in the sense of demonstrating their own ability to do this. Alternatively, the wording to 'identify' could be taken to mean that the student is required to do no more than to provide explanatory comment on a question or issue that has been presented to him/her by the teacher.

Another option to consider is whether the assessment criteria allows for a differentiated approach to be taken, perhaps with higher levels being only possible for students who show independence in the choice of title and in subsequent stages of the enquiry.

If it is considered that the student ought to be given some choice in devising the title, teachers will need to plan for how individual choice can be managed in relation to the work being done under controlled conditions, especially under conditions of High control. The issue is likely to be one of timing, i.e. of ensuring that all students in the same classroom are ready to complete their analysis and conclusions at the same time.

The requirement for each specification is that teachers and/or students devise a hypothesis or identify an issue that will relate to the Exam Board's title for a task. The intention is that there should only be one hypothesis or issue. It is, however, common practice in geographical enquiries for one main hypothesis to be sub-divided into several shorter hypotheses or questions to answer. Care may be needed so that the wording of an enquiry falls within the Exam Board's regulations. A practical point is that there is a strictly limited time and word count, making extensive enquiries impractical (as well, arguably, as being undesirable).

In devising a title, teachers and/or students may also want to consider whether the hypothesis or issue is one that will engage the student's interest and imagination, as well as providing opportunities for the application of geographical knowledge, understanding and skills. This can be done, for example, by addressing a 'real' question to which a solution is needed such as a local planning or management issue. This may be in contrast to a title that leads towards answering a more 'academic' question to which the answer may be more open-ended and of more limited relevance to 'real world' issues. The opportunity to 'contextualise' the Exam Board's task should provide sufficient opportunities to do this.

Linking teaching and assessment

A general point is that the Exam Boards intend that assessment through CAs should be seen as integral to teaching and learning. This would help to achieve the aim that assessment will support 'good teaching and learning'. The AQA Board, for example, states that '*Limited control is just the same as normal classroom practice...*' (a

phrase used in the context of collaborative work). One (WJEC) states as follows: *'Centres are encouraged to develop the tasks for controlled assessment as an integral part of the delivery of the core and/or optional themes. Controlled assessment is seen as the natural outcome of the teaching and learning process and not necessarily additional to content delivery'*. Another (OCR) states that *'Candidates will need to take part in a planned learning programme that covers the underpinning knowledge and skills of the unit in addition to completing the evidence requirements of the designated assessment task title'*. So while it may be an exaggeration to say that Limited Control is 'just the same' as teaching, the wider message is that assessment under CA conditions should equally not be managed in the same way as a formal examination. CA regulations require that some new (or adapted) modes of working are needed.

The AQA Exam Board sets out the guidance that could serve as a model for teachers of all courses adopt for their students *'You might like to break this up into 30 minute slots. Students might, for example, spend part of a lesson completing presentation methods such as graphs or diagrams under Limited control, you could then move the lesson to High level of control and direct them to interpret their graphs. Similarly, students might complete their conclusions and evaluations over several lessons, 30 minutes here and there. You must find what is best for your centre'*.

An implication of this is that teaching can be interspersed with assessment, though the Exam Board regulations do not provide any guidelines on practices that might or might not be acceptable, e.g. if teaching and assessment can be done within the same lesson. One Exam Board (AQA) in its training has recommended that this should not happen. There could certainly be some advantages to students if guidance on how to achieve a stage of assessment, such as describing data, were taught immediately before the work was assessed. Some teachers may also consider whether it would be professional practice to have posters on classroom walls that provide guidance on how a student should carry out certain stages of a task.

An interesting option that will affect the titles, timing and management of a CA is one currently being offered by some Field Study centres. The idea is that all the work for a CA task is done during a residential visit. Some advantages are that: the topic can be studied in the field using the centre's resources; centre staff will become skilled at working with specific titles; the task is completed in a short space of time; ICT resources may be available. There may, however, also be some problems, e.g.: issues over funding of the visit is to be an essential part of the course: completing student record sheets when students are not known by the centre's teaching staff: catering for students who are absent through illness, other unforeseen circumstances or who are not allowed to attend for various reasons. Completing the work while at the centre is one option – another is to complete only the research and data collection stage. Setting aside 6 hours under conditions of high control may not be the best way to use time that is spent in a field study centre.

While assessment should be seen as supporting good teaching and learning, it is, nevertheless, important to remember that a CA task has a summative rather than a formative function. This is irrespective of what a student may learn during the process, for example, as a result of researching a topic that is new to him/her.

Feedback to students

The link between teaching and assessment can be further considered in the context of how feedback can be given to students. The nature and extent of feedback depends on the level of control. The wording of different Exam Boards must be

noted. Some explain this in greater detail than others though the intention is that all conform to the same standards.

There is a general baseline of support/guidance that can be given under all levels of control. This type of support relates to matters of:

- Monitoring progress
- Preventing plagiarism
- Compliance with health and safety
- Ensuring work is completed in accordance with specification requirements

Beyond these general points, the Exam Boards set out regulations that more specifically apply to the different levels of control. Regulations for stages under Limited control are set out by the Exam Boards as follows - extracts have been used, so reference to the full text is needed to provide the full context and meaning.

AQA: 'Under the Limited level of control, you are able to teach the students and help them produce their Introduction, Methodology and Presentation sections of their study. You cannot give written feedback on draft work or provide writing frames'.

Exexcel: 'Feedback can be given to students during the controlled assessment, as part of the research and data collection phase. The details of this feedback must be recorded with the students' final work. Teachers may give students general feedback on:

- *the plan of their investigation*
- *methods of data collection*
- *suitability of materials obtained through secondary research*
- *techniques of data presentation*
- *structure of the final report*
- *skills involved in the analysis and evaluation.*

OCR: Feedback to candidates will be encouraged but tightly defined. Within GCSE in Geography B OCR expects teachers to supervise and guide candidates who are undertaking work that is internally assessed. The degree of teacher guidance in candidates' work will vary according to the kinds of work being undertaken. It should be remembered, however, that candidates are required to reach their own judgements and conclusions.

WJEC: 'The research work/data collection must be supervised by the teacher and guidance given regarding the appropriate sources of research that are applicable for the investigation chosen'. 'Teachers can comment on the research work being undertaken by candidates e.g. on the nature and suitability of the research methodology a candidate has chosen to adopt or the suitability of a questionnaire for primary research'.

These regulations appear to provide considerable opportunities for teachers to provide 'support' during the Limited control conditions. Teachers, however, must also look to the assessment criteria to see the extent to which support may limit the opportunities for students to achieve higher levels within the different assessment criteria.

Written feedback

Although oral feedback is permitted under certain conditions, written feedback is not permitted under any level of control. One Exam Board (AQA) states that *'You cannot give written feedback on draft work or provide writing frames'*. Another (OCR) is clear

that *'Teachers must not provide templates, model answers or written feedback on drafts'*.

It is possible to examine this wording carefully to ensure that the regulations are entirely clear. It could be, for example, that written feedback could be provided on a separate sheet that is not 'on' the draft work. An email could also be sent to a student as written feedback, perhaps commenting on a document that a student had sent as an email attachment. One could also explore exactly what is meant by a 'template' since the extent of prescription set out by the Exam Boards themselves could be regarded as a form of template or writing frame. A problem with this kind of interpretation, however, is that it flies in the face of the professional approach that teachers should be expected to take when working with the new regulations. A standard approach both within and between schools is what is needed, rather than one in which minor advantages are sought through the manipulation of specific regulations. A 'professional' approach involves engaging both with the 'letter' and the ethos of the requirements.

Recording feedback

Although regulations are set out over the feedback that is allowed and not allowed, the Exam Boards still have a need for teachers to record any support/guidance they give to their students. One Exam Board (OCR) provides a blanket statement about the need to authenticate work: *'In all cases, the teacher must be able to authenticate the work submitted for assessment'*. Another Exam Board (Edexcel) states that *'The details of this feedback must be recorded with the students' final work'*. The AQA Exam Board states in the context of High control that: *'The details of this feedback must be recorded with the students' final work'*, though there is no mention that this is needed for conditions of Limited control. They further state that: *'We suggest that the research folders used by your students have a recording sheet attached to (or within) them. Students can record the relevant information at the end of each session. You need only check that this has been done when you collect the files. It is a requirement of the Specification that you note any support given during the High level of control phase on the Candidate Record Form. Noting such support on the record sheet will make it easier for you to do this'*. The WJEC Exam Board states that: *'Teachers must keep a detailed log of any general advice given to all candidates'* and includes two forms on which this is to be done.

It is likely that completing this form for every student, each of who will have received individual support, could be a time-consuming and bureaucratic chore for the teacher. A question may therefore be asked as to why this is necessary, i.e. to what use this information will be put. Under conditions of Limited control, the regulations provide for what appears to be a considerable amount of support, should it be needed. But since this support is permitted, there seems to be little value in recording it. Under High control conditions, the types and amount of support is tightly prescribed so again, there seems to be little point in recording what is given. Teachers will presumably stay within the regulations and indeed, if any individual does overstep the regulations, it is unlikely that the event will be recorded!

If the Student Log/record is to be used in any way, it can only be as a means of adjusting the students' marks, either up or down. If this is the intention, a teacher need to be clear on whether he/she needs to do the adjusting, for example, by limiting access to higher levels as a result of a high degree of support, or whether the Exam Board moderator will do the adjusting. In practice, the accuracy and therefore the reliability of the Student Log may be an issue on account of the classroom conditions under which it will need to be written.

Limited control - Research and data collection

This phase of an enquiry is defined as taking place under Limited control. Regulations for Limited control are variously described by the Exam Boards (see above). One (AQA) states that *'all work with the exception of research must be completed under supervision'*. In this context, 'supervision' presumably means the same as Limited control. The same Exam Board identifies this stage as involving *'preparation, research, planning, processing and presentation'*.

The Exam Boards state that some work in this phase can be carried out without 'supervision', i.e. the research stage. One (Edexcel), for example, states that *'Students may carry out their secondary research and data collection whilst not being directly supervised by a teacher, for example in a library, at home.'* Another (OCR) states that although this stage is to be under Limited control, *'requirements are clearly specified but some work may be completed without direct supervision by the teacher'*. It is also the case that the research stage is to be omitted from the recommended number of hours that are allocated to the task. The practicalities of fieldwork would make the imposition of a set number of hours impossible to implement.

One Exam Board (WJEC) states that *'Candidates' access to resources is determined by those available to the centre and can include secondary research methods such as use of the internet, journals, books, material from relevant organisations and by means of primary fieldwork'*. It further states that *'The research work/data collection must be supervised by the teacher and guidance given regarding the appropriate sources of research that are applicable for the investigation chose'*. An implication of this must be that the research can not be done at home or in any other circumstance that is beyond the teacher's ability to supervise or authenticate the supervision of the work (e.g. in a school library).

It is interesting to note that QCA's generic regulations state that *'Limited supervision (low level of control) – requirements are clearly specified, but some work may be completed without direct supervision and will not contribute directly to assessable outcomes'*. This clearly indicates that research work done outside 'supervision' can not be part of the final assessment – this is a position that may need to be clarified with some of the Exam Boards.

Student collaboration

The new regulations allow for students to collaborate in some stages of the assessment. The relevant statements can be found in sections concerning Collaboration Control. The AQA Board states that *'there can be full collaboration between students'*. It goes on to say that *'The work of individual students may be informed by working with others but students must provide an individual response. Where work is undertaken within a group, or is teacher directed, students must indicate where they have made a contribution to the investigation or have demonstrated initiative'*. All the Exam Boards adopt the same approach with regard to the research stage of the assessment. The WJEC state that; *'The work of the individual may be informed by working with others e.g. in constructing a questionnaire and gathering evidence but candidates must provide an individual response'*.

Use of ICT

The use of ICT in geography has developed to a considerable degree in recent years, often when well used, leading to real gains in the quality of some aspects of student work. Regulations for the use of ICT during CAs need to be carefully studied.

At a basic level, when writing up the task, the Exam Boards offer opportunities for ICT to be used. One (Edexcel) states that: *'Students can use a laptop or pc'*. They go to say that *'They can use spell checks and grammar checks'*. Another (WJEC), however, states that *'Candidates can complete the work in hand-written form or by using ICT. If the work is word-processed the spell checker must be switched off.'* Teachers will need to clarify how marks for the quality of written communications (QWC) can be awarded if the spell and grammar checks are allowed to be switched on.

The Exam Boards all insist that ICT must play some part in the work. It is likely that most schools will want to encourage their students to use generic data presentation software to choose and 'draw' different types of graph and to statistically process raw data. The use of web sites will also be important as a source of secondary research information. One Exam Board (Edexcel) states that students need to demonstrate their skills to *'use Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and digital maps during their geographical investigation'*. Some examples of GIS software are provided, though there is no indication as to the quality of the work that is expected from its use. The use of GIS appears in the WJEC assessment criteria as an item that might be expected to award Level 4 (16-20 marks) in the Skills section for the fieldwork investigations. It is mentioned as an option in the Problem solving/decision making task with the recommendation only that it *'should be promoted'*.

The AQA Board states that; *'If students are able to use ICT throughout the process, their work may be kept in a central folder, possibly 'Geography CA Work' held on your centre network and only accessible during specified times'*.

The final formats of the work can also be open to some variety, for example, the Edexcel Exam Board provides a list of options such as: *'DVDs, PowerPoint presentations, personal diaries, personalised GIS maps (created through web-based applications), web pages'*. Questions have been asked on Ning sites about whether students can present their work as voice recordings. The WJEC Board also states that the format can be *'presented in a range of different modes e.g. Power Point, video/photo sequence, oral, GIS etc. or as a more traditional written report'*.

The Exam Boards, however, are also concerned to ensure that the use of ICT during the High control phase can not be used to give unfair advantage, e.g. by giving opportunities for plagiarism, either direct or in more subtle forms. They therefore insist that all ICT networks are 'locked down' so that students are not able to bring anything to a High control session that they have not previously produced from the Limited control research and presentation stage. By 'locked down', they mean that there can be no access to web sites or to files and folders that may contravene the regulations. The AQA Exam Board mentions another scenario in relation to using ICT with this regulation: *'Memory sticks should be collected after each session if work is to be saved by this method.'*

Resolving this situation will need some thought by teachers. One solution is to make a school (or departmental) rule that all work done under High control conditions must be hand-written. While this situation has not been the intention of the Exam Boards, it may be the approach that some schools are tempted to take. Access to ICT resources under High control conditions may be one limiting factor. School managers may even want to match this approach to creating exam-style conditions in a hall for

the High control stage, thereby making efficient use of staff and ensuring that there is compliance with the High control conditions.

There are, however, some potential problems to adopting this approach. While hand-written work may be an advantage to some students, there is an increasing number for whom it will be a disadvantage – many are now able to type faster (and of course with greater legibility) than they can write by hand. This takes on increased significance on account of the limited time that is available for the work. The use of a word processor also makes it easier to conform to the word limits since work can be more easily and quickly edited. Of greater importance, however, may be the problems that may be caused by separating the digital ways in which data is created for presentation and processing from the ways in which it is written for analysis and evaluation. Maps produced using GIS, for example, can best be regarded as temporary displays of complex spatial data. Producing maps to insert during the analysis and evaluation phase could not be done without access to ICT. All digitally produced maps and other illustrations would need to be printed then pasted into (literally) or attached to hand written documents.

There can be no blanket solution to this question. It is one that can only be resolved at an individual school level, unless of course, the regulations are changed at some stage. For geography and no doubt for many other subjects, this is a situation where the quality of subject is at risk.

High control - Analysis and Evaluation

Conditions of High control are reserved for the stage of a students' work that involves Analysis and Evaluation. The wording, however, differs between the Exam Boards with one (AQA) as noted above, stating that this phase includes '*description, interpretation and analysis, conclusions, evaluation*' for which 6 hours are allocated. The Edexcel Board allocates a total of 8 hours for '*Analysis and conclusions, Evaluation*'. The OCR and WJEC Exam Boards refer only to Analysis and Evaluation, with the other steps either not being expected to be included or as is more likely, that they are subsumed under these headings.

The conditions of High control in relation to Task Taking for all the Exam Boards can be said to be little short of the conditions one needs to impose during a formal examination. For AQA, the conditions are stated as: '*Students:*

- *must work independently and complete work under formal supervision*
- *must not communicate with each other*
- *may have access to their research but not to any secondary resources or the Internet*'.

The OCR Board refers to '*formal, direct teacher supervision at all times*'. The WJEC state that: '*teachers are allowed to communicate with candidates to clarify issues, but not to offer suggestions or solutions. Teachers can give help regarding technical issues*'.

All the Exam Boards have the same regulations about the need for teachers to ensure that students do not bring new resources into the High control sessions, i.e. in addition to resources they have completed during the previous research and data collecting/presentation stage. These resources will need to be kept in folders that are handed out and taken in during every session, or if the resources make use of ICT, be contained in folders that are 'locked'. This will create a situation which students are forced into strict adherence to the enquiry sequence, i.e. without the ability to review what they have done and to make additions that occur to them as they write

their Analysis and Conclusions. Students need to be aware that this is the case so that they are not frustrated by this stricture.

Teachers will need to consider the management implications of these regulations. While students are already familiar with the normal classroom teaching and learning environment and also to some extent, of formal examination conditions, work that may take place in the classroom under high control conditions may not be so familiar, other perhaps than from their experience of tests. Teachers too may find that the inability to intervene with support may be alien to their normal classroom practice. Issues of behaviour may need to be addressed to varying degrees in different schools and even within the same school.

The recommended timings will also have some management implications. In effect, the students are now required to sit through what can amount to more than double the time they spend under formal examination conditions. The timing of this will need to be carefully planned in a whole school basis to ensure that students are not overloaded with such tight assessment conditions at particular times.

A practical problem may arise because of the need to run times of high control because of the different speeds at which students normally work. There is little room for flexibility in this. It may not, for example, be practical for some students to still be working on research and presentation of data under limited control conditions while others move on to analysis and conclusions under high control conditions. Differentiation to take account of individual strengths and needs, as was possible under the previous looser coursework arrangements, are likely be far more difficult under CA regulations.

Faced with these questions, some schools have already made decisions that high control conditions will take place in a school hall under full formal examination conditions. The supervisors of the sessions may be the students' subject teacher, but this could equally be done by a support teacher or the teacher of another subject. The latter scenario would assume that someone other than the subject teacher would be able to offer the restricted amount of support that is allowed and to which the students are entitled in relation to clarifying certain matters. The AQA regulations,, for example, state that the teacher is able to provide: *'advice about the structure of the work to ensure it is organised effectively'*.

It is, however, worth stressing that there are also numerous schools in which solutions have been found or are being actively pursued so that students can complete their work under High control conditions, including the use of ICT, while remaining in the classroom and working according to the ethos under which CAs are intended to be operated.

Meeting special needs

The needs of students with specific learning difficulties may need to be addressed. The WJEC states that *'Candidates with specific learning difficulties can be given extra time as defined in 'Access Arrangements, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration – General and Vocational Qualifications'*. The same Exam Board states elsewhere that: *'The total time allocated to this element of the controlled assessment is specified below in relation to the two tasks. This time span is designed to accommodate the needs of those candidates who need extra time due to, for example, learning difficulties'*. This would appear to indicate that any extra time is already catered for – clarification of this may be a matter to resolve with the relevant Exam Board.

The other Exam Boards are also required to have arrangements in place for students with special needs. AQA, for example, states that *'We can make arrangements so that candidates with special needs can access the assessment. These arrangements must be made before the examination. For example, we can produce a Braille paper for a candidate with a visual impairment'*.

A related consideration for a school will be to ensure that the various grades of TA will need to be informed about the CA regulations as applicable to their support work with individual students. The use of a teaching assistant during a High control session may need to be clarified with the Exam Board.

Absent students

The question of students who are absent has always been an issue with regard to coursework, especially if they have missed a field visit. The new regulations, however, present some additional questions to be resolved. All the Exam Boards require that fieldwork is assessed through CA regulations. Since it is hard to repeat a field visit, a student who has been absent will present a special problem. It may also present a problem if he/she is absent for all or part of the High control conditions. These conditions may not be easy to run on a different occasion.

The AQA Exam Board states that; *'We can give special consideration to candidates who have had a temporary illness, injury or indisposition at the time of the examination. Where we do this, it is given after the examination'*. The OCR Board states that: *'If a candidate submits no work for an internally assessed component, then the candidate should be indicated as being absent from that component on the mark sheets submitted to OCR. If a candidate completes any work at all for an internally assessed component, then the work should be assessed according to the internal assessment objectives and marking instructions and the appropriate mark awarded, which may be zero'*.

Teachers will need to check the relevant regulations with their Exam Board. Information on this web site may also be useful.

http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams_office/access_arrangements/

Word counts

Recommended word counts are provided by all the Exam Boards. They all total 2000, though the total may be reached in different ways, i.e. by either one or two tasks. This creates the situation in which some students will need to complete an enquiry in 1200 words while others have the full 2000 (the remaining 800 being made up by other forms of CA).

There appears to be particular importance attached to these recommended timings. One Exam Board (AQA) states that: *'As there is a maximum of 20 hours available for this component, and some students might miss lessons from time to time, it is important to be clear how much time each student has had on the task'*. Since it is 'important', presumably there are repercussions if the time allowed is exceeded. Students, of course, may wish to ensure that the recommended time is provided. The AQA Board also include the guidance in relation to timing that; *'You must find what is best for your centre'*.

The extent to which schools may be held to account if word counts are exceeded is set out by the AQA Board in this statement; *'There would not be an issue with one or*

two students from your centre going slightly over the 2000 words. If, however, all of your centre's studies seen at moderation were 3000+ words, you will have clearly breached the Specification requirements and all work will be reviewed at the highest level'. Although this regulation is not included in any of the other Exam Board subject regulations, it is clearly an aspect of the assessment over which schools have some responsibility to apply.

Arising from the matter of a word count is the matter of how students are to achieve the highest levels and grades. It is important to understand that with the CA system, the emphasis is now firmly on the quality of student responses. It is also important to understand that this quality needs to be demonstrated with a style of writing and presentation that may be considerably tighter than in the past. As with other aspects of change, this may produce some 'winners and losers'. Some students, for example, are able to write in an economical and high-scoring style – others have considerable problems in adopting this style and coupled with the time limitations and exam-style conditions, may now struggle to demonstrate their best achievement. Teachers will need to take account of this when devising methods to help their students with the techniques that are needed to achieve the highest grades.

Some teachers have already considered how the word count can be extended while staying within the Exam Board regulations. The OCR Board, for example, state that: *headings included within the body of the material presented by the candidate should be included in the word count, but footnotes, figures, tables, diagrams, charts and appendices should not be included*'. This leaves open the option to include explanatory annotation on maps, graphs and diagrams, i.e. text that can be included as an aspect of Analysis, but that would not be counted as part of the body text. Teachers, however, should exercise caution in adopting this approach, bearing in mind that one of the aims of CAs is to make assessment more manageable for both themselves and for their students – one way to do this is by making it shorter! The challenge, therefore, is to find a way to ensure that the quality of the work remains high but that this same quality is achieved in ways that are more economical with text.

Working with assessment criteria

The assessment criteria provide teachers and students with the clearest guidance as to how marks and resulting grades are awarded. The links between assessment objectives (AO1, AO2, AO3) and assessment criteria are not always clear in Exam Board specifications, though what is of greater importance is that the assessment criteria are used. One can also make reference to the separate Grade Descriptors as these relate criteria to GCSE grades. These can be useful when predicting grades or setting grade targets, but it is on the assessment criteria that one needs to focus in order to help students and to mark with consistency and to reliable standards.

Exam Board criteria

Although all Exam Boards adhere to the same broad structure of assessment objectives, their approach to assessment criteria differs markedly in their structure, content, mark allocation and levels. Remember that all marks for the total work done for CA tasks will eventually be recalculated as being out of 25%.

AQA

Each criterion is divided into 3 levels

- Geographical understanding - marks up to 6
- Methodology – marks up to 6

- Presentation – marks up to 9
- Interpretation and QWC - marks up to 9
- Evaluation – marks up to 9

Edexcel

Each criterion is divided into unique levels

Planning – 3 levels with up to 8 marks

Methods of data collection – 3 levels with up to 7 marks

Data presentation and report production – 5 levels with up to 15 marks

Analysis and conclusions – 5 levels with up to 14 marks

Evaluation – 3 levels with up to 6 marks

OCR (Fieldwork assessment item)

Each criterion is divided into 3 levels

Application of Knowledge and Understanding – marks up to 12

Analysis and Evaluation – marks up to 24 three levels out of 24

WJEC

Each criterion is divided into 4 levels

Knowledge and understanding – marks up to 8

Application – marks up to 12

Skills – marks up to 20

It is immediately apparent that these differences make it hard to establish comparable results across the four Exam Boards since in spite of the national assessment objectives, students are able to gain marks that are translated into grades by achieving scores in quite different ways. Indeed, the differences in terminology make it hard to make such comparisons. While this may be of relevance when selecting an Exam Board's specification to use with the students, the questions raised goes beyond the scope of these notes. Nor are they entirely relevant to how a teacher and student work with the criteria for their particular specification.

Interpreting assessment criteria

The use of detailed assessment criteria is not new, so teachers and students will already be familiar with how to make best use of them. Teachers, for example, will already be accustomed to dealing with the wording that uses phrases such as 'a limited number' or 'an appropriate variety' in order to determine different levels of response.

One Exam Board (Edexcel) recommends that students are given a copy of the assessment criteria. Teachers may choose to reword and/or to present the criteria in a different format, i.e. one that will be most accessible and therefore of greatest help, to their students. There may be an issue if a reworded version of the marking criteria takes on the appearance and function of a template, writing frame or model answer.

A concern with an assessment task that is so tightly defined by time and word count is that it is likely to lead to student responses that lack opportunities to respond in more flexible and individual ways, i.e. to fulfil an aim of CAs not to be 'formulaic'. This is linked to the somewhat extensive nature of the assessment criteria, leading to requirements to achieve different levels that are quite stringent and prescriptive.

Awarding levels

There appear to be two approaches to the awarding of different levels. One, as stated by the AQA Exam Board, requires that all aspects of a lower level must be achieved before a higher level can be awarded. This requirement is built into the wording of the various criteria, e.g. to achieve level 2 in Methodology, '*The candidate fulfils the requirements for Level 1*'. There is no mention of how much of the several statements in Level 1 must be obtained, the assumption therefore being that all must be achieved - this is a matter that teachers may wish to clarify with their Exam Board.

There are two obvious problems with this approach. One is that a student may amply demonstrate higher levels of ability in some aspects of a criterion, but may not be awarded the higher level if an item from the lower level has been omitted. A second problem is that this is not the approach that other Exam Boards have adopted.

The OCR Board includes this guidance to teachers: '*The assessment task(s) for each unit should be marked by the teacher according to the given marking criteria within the relevant unit using a 'best fit' approach. For each of the assessment objectives/criteria, one of the three band descriptors provided in the marking grid that most closely describes the quality of the work being marked should be selected*'. The incompatibility between the two approaches could be a concern when comparing standards between different Exam Boards. It is also the case that the more flexible approach of 'best fit' gives more responsibility to the teacher to take professional decisions which perhaps is one of the changes that CAs should be aiming to promote.

The quality of geographical skills

Awarding levels to a strand within the assessment criteria is usually a matter of using a teacher's professional judgement to interpret the wording of the criteria descriptors. There are, however, a few instances where Exam Boards provide further guidance. One such a case is in the AQA specification in which there is a list of skills (identified as mapping and other graphic techniques) that are said to be '*more complex*'. This list is as follows:

- *cross sections (do not exaggerate scales)*
- *beach profiles*
- *proportional flow line maps*
- *isoline maps*
- *choropleth maps*
- *proportional flow line maps*
- *proportional symbols located on to base maps*
- *some statistical techniques (all working shown)*
- *scatter graphs*
- *very well annotated photographs and field sketches.*

Although useful, this list is one that requires some further thought. Some of the techniques, for example, may be familiar to students during KS3 and as such, would be hard to justify as being '*more complex*'. Another consideration should relate to the quality of the technique that has been produced. This can open up questions about how work produced using ICT should be assessed. Beach profiles, for example, can be produced using appropriate software by doing little other than entering raw data on a simple spreadsheet. Even the vertical scales can be adjusted. It may appear odd that this list does not include reference to the use of GIS, though of course, several of the mapping techniques can be produced in this way. The wider point is that teachers should take note of any guidance from Exam Boards with regard to the quality of work that is expected, even when this may be different from the standards they would prefer to expect.

Originality

Finding evidence of a student's individual abilities may not be easy when criteria and structures are so closely defined or when opportunities for original input are curtailed by the teacher. Yet providing opportunities for students to do this would help in the aim of 'supporting good teaching and learning'. One way to provide such opportunities lies in the titles for the assessment that are selected and adapted (a point previously made). Another is to ensure that students are given choices in their work rather than being guided by their teacher.

One Exam Board (AQA), however, includes a specific requirement for students to demonstrate what it calls 'originality' if they are to achieve the higher levels. An example is: *'A data collection technique devised by the student would allow Level 3 access as long as it makes a significant contribution to the study'*. The regulation goes on to state that originality may also be demonstrated if one or a small group of students do additional work, such as collecting data at a different place or time. There is, however, a further statement to the effect that: *'if your students use the same additional data collection technique then 'originality' is difficult to justify'*. The implications of this restriction need to be considered, especially in a school that has a large cohort of entries for GCSE geography. Defining 'originality' in terms of what other students have done, rather than in terms of their creativity as exemplified by their ideas, would seem to be an ill-considered approach to take.

QWC

Marks awarded for QWC are part of the assessment criteria for all GCSE courses. There is nothing new in this.

Teachers need to note the strand of the assessment criteria in which these marks are included, or of the marks lie outside this structure. In the AQA specification, for example, marks for QWC are awarded within the Interpretation and QWC strand: *'Quality of Written Communication (QWC) can be used to adjust the marks awarded within a level in this strand but not to move students into or out of a level'*. Teachers may need to clarify what this means in practice. In the Edexcel specification, marks for QWC are awarded in an assessment strand entitled 'Data presentation and report production'.

Marking student work

This Task Marking aspect of CA work is probably the most straightforward and sees minimal change from previous practice. Ideas about using the assessment criteria have already been covered (above). This section, therefore, deals solely with the administrative procedures of the Exam Boards.

Task Marking is defined as being carried out under conditions of Medium control, meaning that as previously, teachers initially mark the work then send samples to the Exam Board for scrutiny by a moderator. Various items of documentation are needed, such as the log of support given to the student and a record of the times that have been taken for each stage of the work. As mentioned above, it is unclear as to how this information is to be used by the Exam Board. Adjusting grades, either with or without queries, is one possibility.

Confirming the authenticity of all stages of the work is started as being important. The signed record documents are taken as evidence that regulations have been followed. The Edexcel Board, for example, require that:

- *students to sign the Candidate Record Form (CRF) to confirm that the work submitted is their own*
- *you to confirm on the CRF that the work assessed is solely that of the student concerned and was conducted under the conditions laid down by the Specification*
- *you to record marks of zero if your centre/student cannot confirm the authenticity of work submitted for assessment.*

The OCR Board state that; *'Teachers/course tutors must be confident that the work they mark is the candidate's own. This does not mean that a candidate must be supervised throughout the completion of all work but the teacher/course tutor must exercise sufficient supervision, or introduce sufficient checks, to be in a position to judge the authenticity of the candidate's work'*. Teachers will need to consider how he/she can provide such authentication if he/she has not supervised the work at all stages.

A sample of work needs to be submitted. The AQA Board state that; *'The work submitted should be the final piece written up during the analysis and evaluation stage. It may include, as an appendix, work carried out during the research stage, but any material which is not referred to within the main body of the work will not contribute to the mark awarded'*. The assumption here is that any work during research and data collection is only of assessment value if it is an integral part of the analysis and conclusions. The implications of this regulation need to be considered with regard to the marks that can be awarded and how they can be verified. There are 15 marks for Methodology and Presentation of data, yet if each item is not part of the Analysis and Conclusions, it appears that it is not to be sent to the Exam board.

The work sent for moderation is selected in different ways between the Exam Boards. The AQA approach, for example, is that: *'Centres entering larger numbers of candidates will be notified of the candidates whose work will be required in the sample to be submitted for moderation'*, i.e. the choice lies with the Exam Board. The WJEC has a different procedure in which the selection is related to the number of candidates: *'11 – 19 The first and every second (1, 3, 5, 7, etc.)'*. Teachers will need to check on the procedures adopted in the Codes of Practice for their own Exam Board.

Annotation of the students' work is a requirement by the Exam Boards. While this is straightforward when work has been hand-written, it may create some problems when ICT has been used. Although techniques and indeed, complete software systems, are available to enable this to be done, it can present some issues.

Exam Boards require that there is internal standardisation of the students' assessment tasks. These already exist in most schools, though need to be set up where they are not.

The question of whether and/or how a student can retake an assessment task needs to be discussed with each Exam Board. Since the assessment task is divided into distinct stages under different levels of control, there may be a question as to whether all or only part of the assessment could be retaken. One Exam Board (Edexcel) states that:

'For internally assessed units students will need to retake the entire assessment requirements for that unit.

Students that want to resit after they have completed all the assessment requirements of the course will be required to retake at least 40 per cent of the assessment requirements'.

As with other matters of procedure, the details for each Exam Board need to be clarified with reference to their generic Codes and Practices.

Summary points

- CAs provide an opportunity for teachers and students to reassess how evidence of achievement can be both defined and presented for summative purposes – doing this will involve developing practices that will result in evidence that is concise, focused on issues and questions, have a well structured sequence of enquiry and from which students can gain both enjoyment and a sense of achievement.
- Managing the different phases of controlled conditions will present some challenges for which, within the regulations set out by Exam Boards, schools will need to find a range of individual solutions. In finding these solutions, teachers should take regard of how the assessment experience will contribute to both good quality teaching and learning, as well as to high standards in the subject.
- There are some specific questions to resolve with regard to the use of ICT in the assessment of work in geography. Teachers should bear in mind how the use of ICT can play a positive part in the quality of work in geography and ensure that conditions in which it can be fully integrated into the assessment processes.
- While understanding the regulations of each Exam Board is important, it is also important to understand the ethos that lies behind these regulations – this can affect how the regulations are interpreted. In this respect, the opportunities for teachers to reclaim a 'professional' approach to school-based assessment must not be missed.
- Although it is tempting to focus solely on one's own subject and department, the implementation of CAs will best be managed through whole school policies and practices. These will include clarity of communications about the new regulations to both students and parents.
- As the new regulations are implemented, it is important that teachers engage in constructive dialogue with Exam Boards (and subject associations) so that any issues can be resolved and where necessary, regulations can be either changed or interpreted in ways that help to achieve the initial aims of introducing CAs.

FM
December '09