

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG): Response

**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning

A Level & AS Geography Consultation on Conditions and Guidance

Consultation response from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

I am responding to the consultation as the Director of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), on behalf of the Society as its formal response.

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The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is the UK learned society and professional body for geography and geographers. The Society maintains a strong overview of the discipline, its standing and practice in schools, higher education, and the workplace, including professional accreditation. We advise on, and support the advancement of, geography; the dissemination of geographical knowledge to the public, policy makers and other specialist audiences including teachers, scholars, and those involved in expeditions and fieldwork; and training and professional development for practising geographers. We have 16,000 members and Fellows and our work currently reaches more than three million people per year. Each year the Society works with teachers and pupils from about 50% of English secondary schools and our online educational resources receive 1 million+ 'user sessions' annually. The Society's Education Committee advises its work with schools. The key comments and recommendations made below have been discussed and approved by the Society's Education Committee.

The Society's Director Dr Rita Gardner CBE was a member of the ALCAB Subject Advisory Panel for Geography.

This consultation response is not confidential and is an official response on behalf of the RGS-IBG.

Please do contact the Society if you would like any further details about our views and work.

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Overview of response

Question 1 & 2

Do you have any comments on the draft Conditions for new A levels and AS qualifications in geography?

(X) Yes () No

Overall the Society welcomes the subject content and most of the assessment arrangements for GCE Geography.

However, as identified in previous consultation responses, the Society does not support the separation of AS and A Level geography.

The Society welcomes the fact that Ofqual are prepared to review their proposal that the non-exam assessment should be externally assessed. The Society **does not** support Ofqual's proposal that "the non-exam assessment should be marked by the awarding organisations". There are a number of reasons, which we outline below, why the Society does not support the external assessment of non-exam assessment in geography GCE.

The Society strongly believes that the non-exam assessment should be internally assessed and then externally moderated effectively. This approach works well for other subjects with comparable, or greater, levels of GCE entries to geography.

The Society trusts that this response, and we understand comparable consultation submissions from across the geographical community, will strongly encourage Ofqual to reconsider their proposal for external assessment.

Question 2

Do you have any comments on the draft assessment requirements for new A levels and AS qualifications in geography?

(X) Yes () No

If yes, please provide them here:

The Society particularly welcomes

- the 80:20 balance of assessment, with 80% being through examinations and 20% through non-exam assessment
- The introduction of an assessed 'independent investigation'

The Society supports Ofqual's view that the setting of regulatory controls around the non-exam assessment for A Level would compromise the curriculum aims, and that specifying that this task be undertaken under 'controlled conditions' would make the task artificial. We recognise and support the need for safeguards to ensure that an independent investigation is a pupil's own work and that the marks given for this work are valid and reliable. We believe this can be achieved through internal assessment properly moderated externally.

The Society notes that GCE history and the Extended Project Qualification (both of which have significant numbers of entries at A Level¹) also have requirements for non-exam assessment. These requirements are met through the internal assessment of a pupil's work, which is then externally moderated by an AO. The Society is not aware of public concerns over the current administration, validity or reliability of results for history or the EPQ. Indeed, in 2014 Andrew Hall

¹ GCE Geography 33,000 entries, GCE History 51,000, EPQ 33,200 entries

Chief Executive of AQA stated that the EPQ is “a qualification that’s straightforward to deliver in schools.”²

Our case for internal assessment and external moderation

In relation to geography, the Society’s Education Committee was unanimously of the view that it would only be a pupil’s teacher (not an external examiner) who could fully understand the geographical context of a pupil’s independent investigation. This was of particular importance in relation to the need for a pupil’s work to be contextualised within their fieldwork location, such understanding being unavailable to an external examiner.

A teacher’s specific understanding of their pupil’s work also provides a significant check and balance in relation to plagiarism and the need for a pupil’s investigation to be properly ‘individual’.

The Society thus believes that the independent investigation in geography should be internally assessed and then externally moderated. Internal assessment should be supported by training for teachers in the marking of a non-exam assessment and the provision of materials which would exemplify expectations across the grades for A Level geography. In addition, sound feedback on marking quality should be provided by the AOs to help guide teachers’ standards.

We recognise that in the initial years of implementation there could be benefit in the AOs moderating a greater proportion of entire scripts and/or calling in a greater number of specific sections (for example, the conclusion sections of the investigations). This level of coverage may then be reduced to more ‘normal levels’ in subsequent years once the changes have bedded in.

There is a proper case for tight control around specific elements of the independent investigation such as the early submission of a student’s chosen title and (possibly) a short synopsis written by the student about their proposed work. There should be a clear expectation of diversity of titles and approaches within a centre’s submissions and also that titles would change year-on-year.

The Society would welcome extensive moderation and also the requirement for AO moderators to engage directly with a sample of pupils at selected centres. These could be in person or undertaken (on possibly a more cost efficient basis) using video or web conferencing. These ‘viva’ interviews would provide the opportunity for AO moderators to probe a pupil’s understanding of their work, explore whether they had been provided with appropriate or excessive levels of support, and to reach a view as to whether it was their own work.

Members of the Society’s Education Committee³ recognised and accepted that external moderation may lead to their marks being adjusted and in the worst case, if there was a serious misalignment, their school being put ‘on notice’. They noted that this situation existed already with some existing A Levels and felt this as a necessary (and welcome) check and balance if scripts are to be internally assessed.

Members of the Society’s Education Committee also raised significant practical concerns about the ability of the AOs to recruit, train and effectively deploy and retain a new cohort of examiners to externally mark the independent investigations. The issue of the availability of markers for A Level geography is already an issue and the Society notes the comments of Mark Dawe, OCR Chief Executive, in relation to the 2014 cycle, “a shortage of qualified markers in English and geography, and a surge in the number of exams being sat ... meant that it was a close call.”⁴

² A-level results 2014: Extended project overtakes geography and sociology after six-fold rise in entries. 15.08.2014. Times Educational Supplement

³ Which is made up of teachers, head of departments and head teachers/senior managers

⁴ Exam board’s A-level results near miss revealed. 23.02.14 The Guardian

Indeed, if external examination for the individual investigation is pursued, the AOs will need to recruit a substantial number of new examiners. These examiners could only be recruited from the *current* population of A Level teachers and arguably their time would be better spent assessing their own pupils' investigations.

The Education Committee also noted that, as teachers, they felt their school may be more likely to ask for re-mark of the independent investigations if they had been externally marked, rather than if they had been internally marked and externally moderated.

Whilst the Society recognises issue of reliability and validity in relation to the assessment of the independent investigations we **do not** agree with Ofqual's proposal that this aspect of A Level geography be externally assessed. We would, however, support a trial period of three years for internal marking and external moderation. After which, if issues of reliability and validity were found to be systematic, we would then support a move to external marking. However, all the evidence we have from teachers suggests that this would not happen.

Question 3

Do you have any comments on the draft Guidance on assessment objectives for new A levels and AS qualifications in geography?

(X) Yes () No

If yes, please provide them here:

In relation to AO1 the Society has previously noted that in the current specifications the demonstration of knowledge and understanding could comprise up to 50% of the assessment. The Society reiterates its position that the proposed 30-40% range for AO1 is too low. The Society proposes raising the threshold for AO1, for example, the provision of a range of 30–50%.

The Society welcomes amendments to AO3 which now have a stronger focus on the use of relevant quantitative, qualitative and fieldwork techniques, geographical investigation, the interpretation, analysis and evaluation of data and the need to construct arguments and draw conclusions.

Question 4

We have not identified any ways in which the proposed requirements for new A levels and AS qualifications in geography would impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic. Are there any potential impacts we have not identified? If so, what are they?

() Yes (X) No

If yes, please provide them here:

Question 5

Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic? If so, please comment on the additional steps we could take to mitigate negative impacts.

() Yes (X) No

If yes, please provide them here:

Question 6

Have you any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic?

() Yes (X) No

If yes, please provide them here: