

GCE AS/A LEVEL GEOGRAPHY

Fieldwork on your
doorstep: A guide for
students and teachers



Fieldwork on Your Doorstep

Working to collect data and develop fieldwork skills in environments affected by the Covid-19 pandemic provides challenges and opportunities. Working safely and practically in this new environment means that we may be looking to make the most of the opportunities available to us within our immediate home or school environment. There are many opportunities to explore geographical questions on your doorstep and in your local area. Here are some topics which might help you to formulate questions for your class or individual investigation. These are just initial ideas to consider - you should think about one of the ideas and then develop your own questions, or aims as relevant to your area.

If you are investigating any form of **change**, then make sure you start by looking for resources which show what an area *used* to be like. Remember that there are lots of local resources to use – old photographs from local newspapers, old adverts, local census data, old large scale street maps, and the best of all, local people. Those who have lived in an area for many years have a wealth of memories, experiences, and personal views which you can tap into.

For human geography investigations, try to think of alternative or even creative ways to collect your primary data. Can you survey the population to find out how attitudes or perceptions have changed? Could you use surveys completed remotely as well as, or instead of, more traditional 'face to face' data collection via a questionnaire? Could you use Whatts App or Microsoft Forms (using a visible QR code) in your local area to collect this data remotely if necessary? Remember that social media sites such as Twitter or Trip Advisor can also be very useful sources of secondary data about your local area.

For physical geography investigations you often don't need expensive equipment. The key thing is to record all your measurements in the same way, with the same equipment, so that the results are as comparable as possible. Make good use of photographs which you can annotate. You may find old photographs of coasts or mountains which show how much has changed over the years.

Climate / microclimate topic

1. How do temperatures vary with distance from (school) buildings? How do they vary with aspect such as north-facing and south-facing sides of buildings? This works best in winter when buildings are heated, and on calm days. Windy days agitate the air so temperature differences are less clear.
2. How does vegetation affect ground-level temperatures, and temperatures at 1m above the ground? Compare 0m and 1m in open grassy areas with deciduous trees, coniferous wood, low shrubs, concrete or tarmac.

Air quality

What is the relationship between traffic density and different air pollutants? Consider change over time of day in busy locations. Compare different roads – country lanes, housing estates, ring roads, pedestrianized streets. Explore the relationships between pollution, types of traffic and noise levels. Don't forget that there are various types of pollution – how does each differ in distribution, strength etc.? Does pollution intensity vary with different weather conditions such as anticyclones and depressions? Lichens are very good indicators of air pollution. You could explore pollution using lichens on trees, walls, gravestones.

Carbon footprint

Can you estimate the carbon footprint of your home /school / local area? How has this changed over time? How could it be reduced? Are local people informed about carbon footprints? Are they concerned? Why / why not? What steps could be taken to reduce the carbon footprint of a location?

Energy

1. If you live near a source of renewable energy such as a wind farm or hydro dam, how much does that contribute to the national energy supply? What impact does the site have on the environment? What do local people feel about it? If the site is well-established, can you research what people felt when it was planned and built? Local newspapers will have reports. Have views changed over the years? Why?
2. What are the attitudes to sustainable energy in your area? To what extent is your local community carbon-neutral? How much local energy is generated in your area? How many houses have solar panels or wind turbines? How many households have electric or hybrid cars? Survey local households to find out how much and why they have invested in energy-saving measures?

Coastal landscapes

If you live near a coast, you can investigate vegetation change within sand dunes; beach profiles associated with seasonal changes; the impacts of human activity on a dune ecosystem.

Glaciated landscapes

If you live in a glaciated area, you can investigate the characteristics of the sediments which form glacial, fluvioglacial or periglacial landforms. How is human activity impacting on, and managed in, your local glaciated landscape?

Changing Places

It's amazing how change happens but you don't notice it. Even if you look back over the last 10 years, you will notice change.

1. How has your area changed over time? Have some areas changed more than others? Why? Has there been a local government initiative? How successful has the change been? What do local people think? This is a great opportunity to interview people who have lived in an area for many years. But remember that they often think of 'the good old days' and may not be objective. That doesn't matter as long as you take that into account in your analysis. Use old photographs of the area, old newspapers, the local town planning archive, old large scale street maps, census data, local economic data. You could combine this with PQLI and even estimate the PQLI from old photographs.
2. Clone Towns. Has your local area become very like others in the UK? To what extent is your local area a Clone Town? In a shop survey compare the number of individually owned shops with those which are national or regional chains. <https://www.deferrers.com/attachments/download.asp?file=5063&type=pdf>

What types of shops characterise your local area? What influence have they had on local commercial activity? Do they help or hinder the development of your area? What is it that makes your local area 'special'? Ask local people what they think about individual shops and chains of shops (not just 'chain stores') and the impact on your local area.

3. How global is your local area? Is it well connected in terms of IT, transport, international shopping, businesses, social activities, faith centres? What do local people think about global influences in their community? Are there difference of opinion between age groups? If you identify any problems or challenges, how might they be resolved?

Crime

1. Which parts of a town are perceived to be the safest? Why is that? How do perceptions of safety vary during the day / evening / night; between different types of crime; between different age groups? Link the perceptions to a map of surveillance cameras, metal window shutters, amount of streetlighting, number of people in the street, number of police. Do people feel safer when in groups or alone?

Can you make a mood map to analyse how people feel about their local area? This may vary considerably between age groups.

Is there a relationship between types of crime and the physical quality of different neighbourhoods / streets?

2. Crime prevention survey. Is there a relationship between crime prevention installations such as burglar alarms, lighting sensors and cameras, and the types / amount of crime in an area? Is there a relationship between (types of) crime and house prices? Use the local neighbourhood crime statistics to give you some background, and ask local people about their perception of crime. Remember – crimes vary considerably in type and severity. Try not to use summary data.

Environmental quality

Most built-up areas have variations in environmental quality. To what extent are there differences in the physical quality of these environments (Physical Quality of Life Index). Map the PQLI across a local area using indicators such as graffiti, street appearance, condition of buildings and gardens, open space / parks, litter, noise, security measures. Explore relationships with socio-economic indicators in the local census data such as amount of home-ownership, house prices, ratable value, age of population etc.

How do local people perceive their own neighbourhoods compared to others in terms of friendliness, community, safety, local services? Is there a relationship with environmental quality? Why? Why not?

Changing Leisure activities

1. What leisure activities are available in the local area and for whom? What is their 'reach' or sphere of influence? Why? How have leisure activities change during the lockdown? Are people doing different things? Does this vary by age? Social group? What triggered these changes and are they permanent? How/why?
2. Is your local area a tourist destination? How has the lockdown and opening-up after COVID-19 affected local businesses, services, the environment? How do local people feel about tourists returning? Does the area have a sustainable future?

Changing Shopping patterns

1. How have people's shopping patterns changed over time? You can consider before and after the lockdown. Or you could explore change over the last few years. How and to what extent has digital shopping changed shopping habits? Frequency of shopping? Impact of home delivery? What types of items are affected most? Has this affected local shops? Interview shopkeepers to find out.
2. To what extent are town/ village centres changing? What types of commercial activities are there now compared with 5–10 years ago? What do local people think about changes? Do views differ between age groups? Why? Does this cause problems and how might they be resolved?

Changing industries

How have the industries in your local area changed over the last 30-50 years? What impact has change had on the local area? Has it been successful? How has industrial change been managed and by whom? Have redevelopment initiatives had a positive impact? Look for old, large scale maps of your area, ask local planners, and interview local people who have lived in your area for some time. What do old photographs tell you?

Gentrification

Has your local area been redeveloped or gentrified over the last few years? How have buildings changed in appearance and use? What do local people think? Is there evidence of current gentrification such as scaffolding, house extensions, builders, skips, diverted pavements and traffic cones? What impact does/will this have on the

local area? Are all areas changing or just a few? How will gentrification affect the whole community?

Studentification

There is increasing interest and research on the impact of students on local communities. Your local area may include lots of student accommodation. Can you map the houses where students live? Think about the evidence – bins outside, unkempt front gardens, identical curtains, signs of multiple occupancy. What impact does a high concentration of students have on the local area, services, pubs, shops, the permanent community? What do local people think about noise, safety, commercial activity, environmental quality? Are there perceived links to anti-social behaviour? Is this real or a personal bias against students?

Rural rebranding

If you live in a rural area, how has commercial activity and land use changed? Have farmers changed what they do? Are fields and hedgerows managed differently? Have farms diversified their commercial activities? What impact has that had on the local area and community? What services have declined (think about schools, shops, medical services, public transport links)? How many holiday homes are there in the local area? Are they concentrated in one place? Is change welcomed by everyone? Has the sense of 'community' in your area changed – for better or worse?

