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General Certificate of Education

Archaeology 2011
Specification

Unit ARCH4

Report on the Examination
2010 examination – June series

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Unit ARCH4

Archaeological Investigation

General Comments

As this was the first time candidates had submitted studies for the new specification this report will focus first on how the new format was approached, looking in particular for evidence of good practice.

The format clearly guided many teachers and candidates to produce logical and balanced studies. Large numbers of students evidently displayed a sense of enjoyment in fulfilling the tasks they had chosen and were able to show how their tightly focused area of study fitted into the wider archaeological context. For the most part, sensible practical activities were engaged in, providing valid evidence for analysis and discussion. It is rewarding to moderate work from candidates who have made such positive links to the world of British archaeology (museums, universities, units, excavations, Portable Antiquities Scheme) and benefited from the experience. Individual positive outcomes are listed later in this report, but the clear sense is that attention to detail and advice, both from AQA and teachers, combined in many cases to produce thoughtful studies across a wide variety of topics.

The Specification (page 14) clearly states that studies should contain sections headed *Rationale*, *Context*, *Methodology*, *Evidence*, and *Evaluation*. A significant minority chose to ignore this advice. Teachers should understand the links between format and assessment criteria and point students to the necessary elements of a successful study. Some centres missed the relative significance (and weighting) of secondary evidence (*Context* – 10 marks) and primary research/activity (*Evidence* – application/data/recording/illustration – 20 marks) allowing the former to dominate the latter, sometimes to the almost total exclusion of first-hand activity.

When making their assessments teachers should make allowance for misplaced yet valid material, e.g. where reference to *Methodology* appears in the *Rationale* or *Context* is found in *Evidence*. Such deviation should be reflected by the level awarded to Communication Skills (coherence) in *Evaluation*.

The recommended format contains bullet points to guide teachers and students (see Specification, page 14). In *Rationale* the first (reason for choice of topic) was regularly observed, with the better candidates revealing some insight into their decision-making processes. The second, which requires consideration of the aims and objectives of the work (and, indeed, an evaluative question as the title) was less well responded to, though it should be obvious that such statements would set a candidate up effectively to make explicit links back to their plan throughout the following sections.

It had been expected that *Context* would allow scope for background research both of a general scene-setting nature and more specifically topic-focused, e.g. a study of a hillfort would briefly put hillforts into their archaeological context and then reference previous work including a summary of any excavations on the site. Thus the background would be set for the key element of the Personal Study. Unfortunately, perhaps because of the relative ease of obtaining secondary material and a lack of summary skills, too many candidates went further or deeper into general background than was required for balance. Some did so whilst still failing to

mention any previous work on their key site; candidates should be reminded of the need to be explicit about how their study will use and develop from previous work.

It should not have passed unnoticed that synoptic assessment features in this unit (as well as ARCH3). The Specification gives prompts (page 20) and the last assessment criterion across Levels 1-4 in *Context* indicates appropriate levels of response. Better candidates picked up links to other units in their *Rationale* and *Context* e.g. study of moated sites linked to status (ARCH3), hillforts to settlement and warfare (ARCH3), Egyptian funerary material to grave goods and ritual (ARCH1). They then discussed the methods they were using for their research in the light of what they had learned in ARCH2. Their evaluation and conclusion afforded such candidates an opportunity to revisit and expand on the links they had established earlier. However far too many candidates either totally ignored this element of their work or made limited passing reference (in effect 'ticking the box') without any sense of deeper understanding. In some cases the links were simply made by teachers who annotated scripts during marking with words such as 'synopticity here to ARCH3' – the opportunity spotted and noted by the marker but originally spurned by the candidate.

Methodology content was clearly outlined in the Format and most achieved 3 or 4 marks here. For Level 4, a higher level response was required with focus and objectivity.

The *Evidence* section is where a student should come into their own undertaking first-hand observation and recording of a part of the archaeological record resulting in collection of data for analysis and presentation which then leads on in the following section to an ability to evaluate evidence against their original question and draw apposite conclusions. There is an acceptably wide variety of approaches by centres to this activity. Much depends in the first instance on giving support at the time of topic selection to ensure that it encapsulates sufficient opportunities for first-hand activity. It is essential that teachers assure themselves of the validity of any question, hence the Outline Proposal Form asks questions of them which should prompt more than simple affirmative answers. AQA's Coursework Guidance Notes contain suggestions of a variety of suitable titles which can be used to develop other similar studies. It remains clear from the work submitted that finding a relatively little-known local site or accessing a sensible volume of material in a museum offer a sound way forward rather than trying to wrest a new angle out of major sites (with guidebooks) or previous excavations or limited collections of artefacts. Whilst it is understandable that teachers wish to reward candidates for their effort, indication of fieldwork alone is not enough to justify higher levels; candidates need to collect and effectively record sufficient evidence to achieve these higher marks.

The weighting of ARCH4 remains, as in ACH6, at 40% of A2. Sufficient time should be allocated. Students need to consider topics in June/July or at least September and be prepared to spend a fair amount of time and effort on their research and activity. Too frequently it is apparent that studies are completed in a hurry or were clearly not high on a student's agenda when their time was being apportioned. Sometimes moderators don't even need to read between the lines – we are told that "I was on site for 2 hours" or "I was unable to research this element in the time I had" or we see a travelogue of pictures taken on holiday with captions added later.

Better centres/candidates have clearly got involved in the practical work – for example, they measure and record earthworks (plans, slope-profiles, cross-sections), investigate concepts (inter-visibility status, nearest neighbour analysis), select and illustrate a range of artefacts, collect data and present it in charts as well as using photography to illustrate key points. Less effective is over-reliance on the camera and a reluctance to put in sufficient time and effort to 'fieldwork' resulting in the over-use of secondary sources and others' illustrations. It is not expected that studies will necessarily appear to the standard of published work but it is clearly

apparent that some students, with the right guidance and encouragement, can produce worthwhile graphical presentations of field or artefactual evidence that reveal an understanding of a genuine archaeological approach. Many students will be able to look back at what they produced for ARCH4 with a sense of deserved pride.

In the *Evaluation* section weaker candidates tend simply to repeat material from earlier and this is not going to progress them beyond Level 2. Better candidates refer back to their study title and are led by the evaluative element (To what extent..., How far..., How important...) into an examination of the value of their personal research (*Evidence*) in combination with the previous state of archaeological knowledge (*Context*) and how they can be combined to provide an answer. It is the processes leading to the conclusion that underpin the quality of the study. Nevertheless, conclusions should be valid/appropriate, and based upon a range of evidence, to justify and access higher levels.

In the light of experiences from 2010 studies and assessment, some minor modifications are being made to the AO1 Evaluation Assessment Grid. Statements across each of the Levels (1-4) will reference: critique of methodology; evaluation and its link to the original question; conclusions; judgements made on evidence; coherence; skills and synoptic understanding; QWC. These amendments will be discussed at teacher meetings in autumn term and will be available in the updated on-line specification.

Some positive outcomes from 2010 to build upon:

- Clarity of contents list and pagination
- Figures numbered sequentially and with some title/caption
- Students drawing their own maps/plans so they can focus on what they, rather than Google, see as important
- Digital technology, if well-handled
- Word counts, some by section too, reflect balance (see notes below) and attention to detail
- Few excessively long (5000+ words) studies – AQA continues to discourage these as the essential ingredients of a full-mark study can and should be delivered in approx. 4000 words;
- Appendices (see notes on page 14 of Specification) with bibliographies reflecting a range of source material
- Fewer scrapbooks
- Use of standard approaches to particular types of fieldwork or methods of analysis; reference to easily accessible authoritative works e.g. Rodwell, Church Archaeology; Wilson, Aerial Photography; Anderson, Pottery; Wass, Surveying.

Some areas for improvement noted from 2010 studies:

- Imperial measurements are understandable when derived from older reports (though they could be translated) but metric should be used as the default position – a length of “11.7 inches” should simply not be given in 2010
- Spelling of key terms such as *metre* or *Domesday* – better proof-reading needed
- Poor representations of artefacts, particularly pottery, where there are conventions for illustration
- ‘Hand-axes’ in the Neolithic
- Poorer use of digital technology and photographs
- Essay-style studies which should not be supported by teachers as valid submissions

- Purely scientific topics whether based on human biology, chemistry, physics, medicine, etc. where the focus shifts too far from the archaeological mainstream. Such proposals should be passed by the Coursework Adviser to ensure validity.

Topic areas which worked well: smaller earthworks; barrow siting; airfields; wells; comparative studies of different denomination religious buildings; data from Portable Antiquities Scheme; watermills and associated watercourses; typology of artefacts.

Topic areas to approach with caution: anything based around a questionnaire; effectiveness of presentation; church development and change; urban development and change; sites where little or nothing survives so reliance is on secondary sources; anything that tends to essay form.

The Coursework Adviser has been asked at teacher support meetings to provide advice on word-count breakdowns for each section. Without giving a precise numerical response, it should be considered that direct proportions cannot be taken strictly from the mark allocations. The AO2 mark (which includes *Rationale*) carries 25% of the total but is not likely to generate 1000 words, nor need it do so. Some of this word 'allocation' can therefore be passed to other sections and a ratio between *Evidence:Context:Evaluation:Methodology* of 4:2:2:1, if handled sensibly and flexibly, should provide a balanced study in the region of 4000 words.

In summary, many centres and students successfully got to grips with the new specification and its revised demands and hopefully they can build on this in 2011. Those who found it more difficult to adapt or were troubled by their first attempt can take comfort from the achievements of others that change is possible. Hopefully this report and future teacher support meetings will help them to work effectively with and for their candidates next year.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results statistics** page of the AQA Website.