

A Level

Archaeology

ARCH4 Archaeological Investigation
Report on the Examination

2010
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ARCH 4: Archaeological Investigation

General Comments

The standard of some of the work submitted this year was excellent. Students were imaginative, innovative and enthusiastic, creating investigations that were worthy of undergraduate studies. Furthermore, as reported in the 2012 report, it is encouraging that many of the points raised in that and earlier reports to assist schools and colleges in improving their performance have been taken on board resulting in most studies being even more closely linked to the format for the unit as set out in the specification. The vast majority of the studies were in the region of 4000 words and developed the skills of acquiring, sifting, presenting and evaluating evidence coherently and with precision. It must be stressed that it is possible to achieve the highest marks with studies of this length, and students should continue to be dissuaded from writing at greater length.

Key headings were adhered to in the majority of cases, allowing for a coherent structure to the work, and the majority of teachers were adept at awarding marks where material appeared within the study even if it was in a different section. The Teacher Support meetings and Standardisation process have both stressed the importance of reading and mentally assessing the study as a whole prior to deciding on appropriate levels of attainment and indeed mark allocation within the noted level; it is pleasing to observe that in the majority of cases this advice has been taken on board.

The Rationale continues to cause some difficulty in its application, and it is appreciated that it is probably the most difficult section to both address and assess. In order to access the highest marks for this section students should move beyond simply personal motives and explain the archaeological justification for their choice of study. They should be encouraged to be more explicit about whether their study examines new evidence or attempts a different angle to that applied to the same material in past. In some cases students might even utilise a previously unused method of fieldwork survey, artefact or ecofact analysis, or test old evidence in the light of recent new approaches to, or interpretations of, the period, generic site or feature type, artefact or ecofact types or assemblages. Such initial clarity of purpose helps them in planning their examination of any such previous material in the HER and other published sources. It should also help students to set the broader archaeological context more successfully and to reach more appropriate judgements and conclusions, and therefore score more highly on the Context, Evaluation and Conclusions criteria. Opportunities are still lost in fully addressing the ethical and practical aspects of this section. For example with reference to land ownership, issues when working in places of worship and graveyards, and more recent studies, for example WWII sites and monuments where living relatives may still exist.

On the whole the Context section was again strong, with a great deal of evidence of engagement with HERs, college LRCs, public library collections and relevant internet sites. However, in a significant minority of cases students still tended to produce an “all I know about” piece, with few references made to the relevance (or not) of the information provided. More importantly, whether students were attempting studies focussed on earthworks or buildings, considering museum collections, or carrying out experiments, there was often a lack of background material on the discipline behind the study. It is worth stressing again that students should be directed to and encouraged to use easily accessible authoritative works on specific types of evidence or periods e.g. The Defence of Britain Handbook, Coles on Experimental Archaeology, Clarke's volume on The Archaeology of Airfields, Margary and/or Bagshawe on Roman Roads, trade directories such

as Kelly's, the English Heritage/Batsford series, to help identify features in the field and enable comparisons with standard typologies.

As stressed in previous reports, students need to be reminded that books (rather than websites) will usually provide the best background information, although websites can often provide up to date information on specific sites. It must be stressed that students need to discriminate between web sites. Site addresses containing ".ac" are usually more likely to be reliable, in particular archaeology gateway sites such as www.britarch.ac.uk and www.ahds.ac.uk/archaeology which provide links to useful resources. Professional Archaeology Units often have very useful and informative sites, with good examples being www.museumoflondonarchaeology.org.uk <http://www.oxfordarchaeology.com/> and www.wessexarch.co.uk/. Google Scholar provides links to sites that have been properly peer reviewed, but it is understood that not all schools and colleges will have licences in place to access this material. Synoptic links were far more skilfully teased out this year, with students making a focussed link to a particular theme they have studied rather than simply putting 'ARCH3' in brackets.

This year the Evidence section showed even more first-hand engagement with the site and/or topic than in previous years. Students demonstrated that they were getting into the field and recording/analysing the evidence first-hand. Below are some important pointers regarding this section. The best students (where relevant):

- put scale and orientation on drawings and photographs of sites/parts of sites
- used photographs and drawings (i.e. commented upon and annotated them as relevant)
- handled artefacts and collections rather than photographing them through glass
- accessed and assessed both the inside and the outside of buildings
- drew phase plans and elevations of buildings
- avoided large and well known sites where little personal study would be possible
- carried out experiments that answered focussed questions, and underpinned their methodologies with archaeological evidence
- avoided experiments where the complexity of the process or lack of authentic materials led to shortcuts that seriously undermined the validity of the study.

The modified mark scheme seems to have clarified the need for students to answer their questions and draw appropriate conclusions. This year, only a very few studies contained a "what went well/less well" section in place of drawing some valid conclusions.

Students continue to choose topics that cover a range of periods and types of study. Some novel examples from 2012 included:

- an experiment into the characteristics/production of Egyptian hair dye
- an assessment of the development of a 17th century farmhouse
- the development of parts of the London docklands.

Furthermore, students from urban schools and colleges came up with imaginative ways to utilise the built environment. Examples included:

- an assessment of mouldings on the facia of Victorian terraced housing
- the changing use of public houses and inns
- tracing the route of old roads through urban areas.

Amongst more familiar studies were:

- an assessment of a developed hill fort in Somerset
- an investigation into a site of Roman lead mining
- an investigation into the possible route of a Roman road.

It is pleasing to note that there were very few studies this year that demonstrated the perennial problems of photographing museum collections through the glass and/or relying on poorly considered and inappropriate questionnaires.

There continue to be areas for improvement. These were noted by the moderating team from their observations of the 2013 studies – some new, others perennial:

- over-reliance on photography where a drawing is a better way of conveying information
- simple survey work on earthworks using tapes, inclinometers and ranging poles continues to be a dying art
- failure to use photographic evidence through lack of comment and annotation
- only accessing the outside of churches and other buildings
- Google maps/satellite images (which can be valid) with ‘pins’ stuck in them (these can be removed if the “layers” on the menu are un-ticked)
- the continued mis-spellings of key terms e.g. aerial, metre, Domesday, hachures.

The Moderation team noted that where schools and colleges failed to either seek, or act upon, the advice of the Coursework Adviser, their students were more likely to under-achieve, sometimes quite significantly. Once again, it is **strongly** urged that schools and colleges use the Coursework Adviser system. It will remove the problem of students using inappropriate or non-evaluative questions as their titles and being disappointed at a poorer outcome for their efforts. It will also prevent students tackling questions where they cannot possibly carry out any first hand investigation. Furthermore, teachers that fail to do this are doing their students a great disservice.

A final point worth noting is in relation to ARCH4 studies being incorporated into responses in other papers, especially ARCH3. Although ARCH4 sites are occasionally used to illustrate an answer, ARCH3 examiners remain surprised how little use is made of their personal studies given the knowledge that students have of their chosen site and/or subject of investigation.

Students continue to produce innovative, interesting and stimulating studies; the enjoyment and enthusiasm shone through. Moderating them is both a pleasure and a privilege.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion