

A-LEVEL

Archaeology

ARCH4 Archaeological Investigation
Report on the Examination

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Unit ARCH4: Archaeological Investigation

General Comments

On the whole, the major issues continue to be the same, with by far the most serious being where schools or colleges do not get their titles approved by the coursework advisor. That said, the majority of studies are fascinating pieces of work, and a pleasure to read and assess.

In line with previous years, the standard of studies submitted this year was, on the whole, superb. Many students were again imaginative, innovative and enthusiastic, on occasion creating investigations that were worthy of undergraduate studies. This continued improvement is clearly the result of schools or colleges utilising advice and guidance from previous Reports on the Exam, together with that provided by the coursework adviser via the Personal Outline Forms. This has resulted in most investigations being closely linked to the format for the unit as set out in the specification. Although there is no penalty for exceeding the word limit, students that do so will often penalise themselves through the extra work involved, and sometimes via a lack of clarity of argument that comes from failing to be concise. As such, it was pleasing to observe that the vast majority of the studies were in the recommended region of 4000 words and developed the skills of acquiring, sifting, presenting and evaluating evidence coherently and with precision. It must again be stressed that it is possible (as was demonstrated by a number of students) to achieve the highest marks with studies of this length, and students should continue to be dissuaded from writing at greater length.

Again, the 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; this remains especially the case for the Rationale. This reemphasises 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 levels; it is a good way to get a feel for the work, and helps as a guide when deciding upon the final mark in each section.

Students continue to come up with topics that cover a range of periods and types of study. Some novel examples from 2015 included:

- the typology of London police boxes
- an assessment of an abandoned mine (properly health and safety assessed!)
- an investigation into the physical evidence left behind by 'Dig for Britain'
- a museum assessment of oriental bows
- an experiment into aspects of Anglo-Saxon food production.

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

- an investigation into the development of a building in a town centre
- tracing the medieval centre of an urban area
- an investigation into the pre-industrial archaeology of an urban area.

Amongst more familiar studies were:

- an investigation into the validity of typology for the study of gravestones
- an investigation into the possible role of prehistoric hill top settlements
- investigations into various roads and trackways.

How can students do better still?

The Rationale again caused the most difficulty in its application. 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 try to be more explicit about how their study might complement previous material; something as simple as carrying out a field walk or a simple earthwork survey on a small feature can be more than enough if it has not been attempted before. The other point to address in this section is the need to be more specific about the sources to be consulted. There is no expectation that they should all be named, but something more detailed than '1 will consult the HER and books on hill forts from the college LRC and local library' is needed. This should all 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/practical aspects of this section. For example potential problems relating 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.

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 some cases there was either the indiscriminate use of poorly produced Google Maps images. Some investigations produced were an 'all I know about' piece, with few references made to the relevance (or not) of the information provided. It must again be stressed that students should be directed to and encouraged to use easily accessible authoritative books on specific types of evidence or periods to help identify features in the field and enable comparisons with standard typologies. Students need to be reminded that books (rather than websites) will often provide the best background information.

Websites can often provide specific up to date information on specific sites but students must discriminate between websites. 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 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. Although there is no requirement that students cite sources using a recognised academic method such as the Harvard System, it is essential that sources are noted next to diagrams, extracts, etc and that these are then listed in a bibliography. The teasing out of synoptic links continues to improve; it is evident that this is becoming embedded into the preparation for these investigations.

In the Evidence section, the best investigations showed some excellent first-hand engagement with the site and/or topic, very much in line with previous years. Students again demonstrated that they

were getting into the field and recording/analysing the evidence first-hand. Furthermore, simple survey work on earthworks using tapes, inclinometers and ranging poles continued to flourish this year.

Below are some important pointers regarding this section. The best investigations (where relevant):

- put **scale** and **orientation** on drawings and photographs of sites/parts of sites
- **used** photographs and drawings (ie students putting a properly labelled illustration of the generic type (or a closely dated example from elsewhere) right next to a well labelled graphic or photographic record of the specific evidence they were looking at, got the most out of this type of evidence)
- **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
- included plans showing the exact positions of particular features photographed/surveyed
- 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.

There continue to be general areas for improvement. These were noted by the moderating team from their observations of the 2015 studies – some new, others perennial:

- over-reliance on photography where a drawing is a better way of conveying information
- poor quality small and/or blurred photographs
- students mixing up brick and worked stone, or Gothic and Romanesque arches, so clearly not understanding what they are recording or interpreting
- failure to **use** photographic evidence through lack of comment and annotation
- amassing evidence (often in vast quantities) and then doing nothing with it
- only accessing the outside of churches and other buildings
- failing to obtain sufficient sample sizes, particularly where artefacts or gravestones are being analysed
- 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.)

It is very concerning that despite the continued recommendations to do so, some schools and colleges still fail to either seek, or act upon, the advice of the coursework adviser. It is **essential** that schools and colleges use the Coursework Adviser system. This will prevent the problem of students using inappropriate or non-evaluative questions as their titles. This will also prevent students tackling questions where they cannot possibly carry out any first hand investigation. **It must again be stressed that it is important that schools and colleges consult the coursework adviser as this is a key part of the ARCH4 process.**

A point again worth stressing is that 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. Synopticity both allows for other parts of the specification to inform ARCH4, and for ARCH4 to inform in particular the other A-level unit, ARCH3.

Archaeology students continue to produce innovative, interesting and stimulating studies that demonstrate very high levels of skill and independent learning; the enjoyment and enthusiasm again shone through. Moderating them continues to be 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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UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion