

Document 1

What's causing the cold weather?

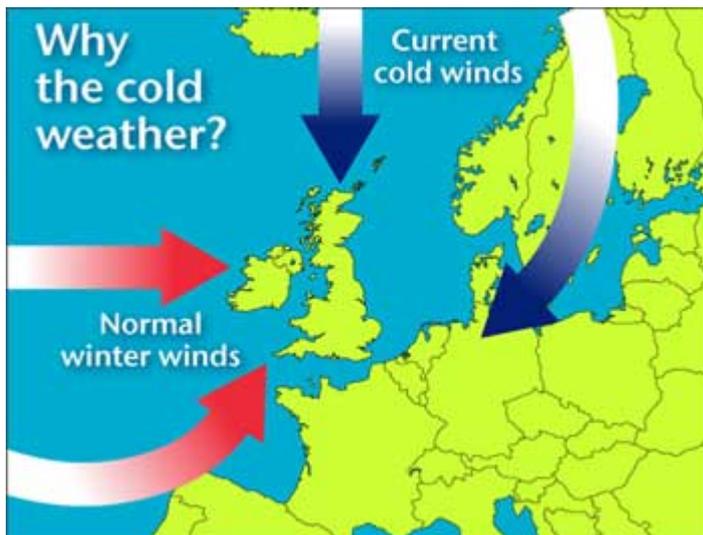
Source: Met Office 06/01/2010

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/corporate/pressoffice/2010/pr20100106b.html>

6 January 2010



In most winters, and certainly those in the last 20 years or so, our winds normally come from the south-west. This means air travels over the relatively warm Atlantic and we get mild conditions in the UK. However, over the past three weeks the Atlantic air has been 'blocked' and cold air has been flowing down from the Arctic or the cold winter landmass of Europe.



The low temperatures in the UK have also been accompanied by snow. This is because areas of low pressure have been running in from the north-east, tracking across the North Sea and picking up moisture along the way, which falls as snow.

However, it is not cold everywhere in the world. North-east America, Canada, North Africa, the Mediterranean, and south-west Asia have all seen temperatures above normal – in many places by more than 5 °C, and in parts of northern Canada, by more than 10 °C.

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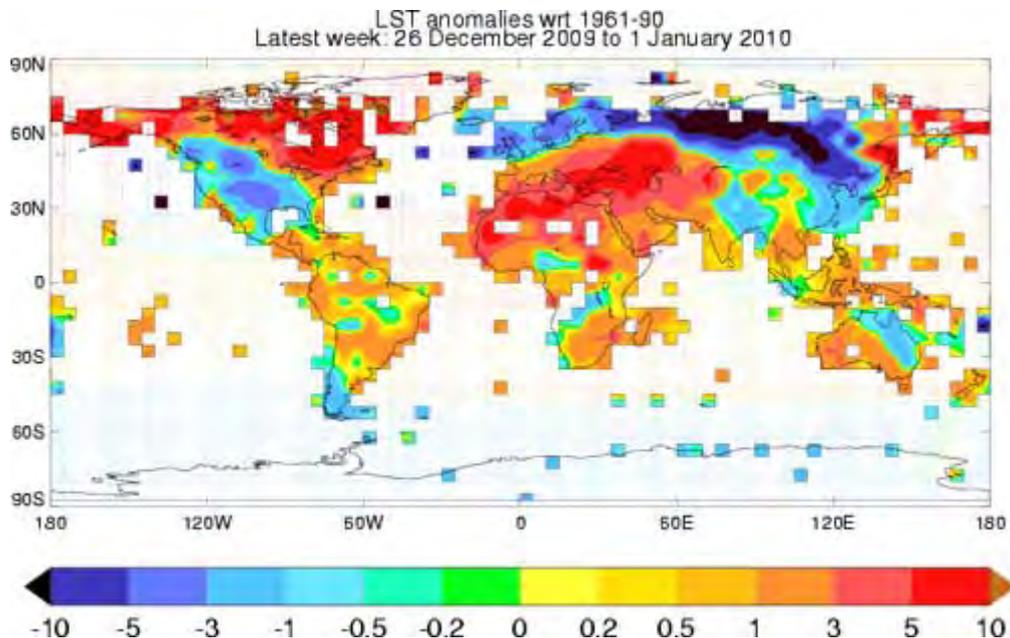


Fig 1. The map shows that while it has been cold in Northern Europe, other parts of the world have seen above average temperatures.

Is it colder than average?

The mean UK temperature for December was 2.1 °C, making it the coldest for 14 years and colder than the long-term average for December of 4.2 °C. However, December was one of only two months in 2009 which had a below-average mean temperature.

What does this say about climate change?

Climate change is taking place as the earth continues to warm up.

In the UK, 2009 as a whole was the 14th-warmest on record (since 1914). This above-average temperature trend was reflected globally, with 2009 being the fifth-warmest year on the global record (since 1850).

The current cold weather in the UK is part of the normal regional variations that take place in the winter season. It doesn't tell us anything about climate change, which has to be looked at in a global context and over longer periods of time.

Document 2

Schools shut-down sends the wrong message to pupils... and forces parents to miss work

Source: Daily Mail 03/02/2009

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1133802/Schools-shut-sends-wrong-message-pupils--forces-parents-miss-work.html>

Closing schools because of snow is teaching children a bad lesson, a parents' group warned today.

Margaret Morrissey, of the Parents Outloud campaign group, said it sent out the message that if life gets difficult you should simply stay at home.

She called for an 'emergency plan' to be introduced to allow more schools to stay open in the event of bad weather.

Her comments come as hundreds of schools across the country announced that they would be closing their doors for the second day running.

Mrs Morrissey said: 'We are giving children the message that when things get difficult you should just stay at home and have fun.

'Then, when they keep taking sick days from work when they grow up we wonder why.'

She said the continuing closures would be extremely difficult for parents who would have to balance work with childcare.

'Parents are stuck between a rock and a hard place. It's great fun for children to be able to stay at home and play in the snow, there's great excitement, especially since it happens so rarely.



'But it is terribly difficult for parents, that, come whenever it may be, you've got to go to work and you've got the added problem of what to do with the children.'

Mrs Morrissey added: 'The problems schools have are exacerbated by the government bringing in thousands of health and safety laws, some are very important, but others are not.

'Schools have to have the right ratio of pupils to teachers to be able to open.

'In my day all the children sat in the hall and you had the head teacher and one or two others reading to the children, doing quizzes, all those kinds of things.

'It was great fun, you were at school, you did get to go in the playground, you did get to play in the snow, we were taught things like not to make snow balls out of ice, all the things you have to learn as you grow up.'

Mrs Morrissey said that there should be a better solution for schools than simply having to close.

Document 3

Education Secretary defends school snow closures after parent backlash

Source: Times Online 03/02/2009

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/weather/article5652455.ece>

The Education Secretary today defended the 8,000 schools that stayed shut for a second day because of the snow, after parents complained that they had to take an extra day off work to look after their children at home.

Ed Balls said that head teachers had been right to keep their schools closed, after South and East England were hit by up to 1ft (30cm) of snow yesterday and more blizzards were forecast.

Parents have queried why classes could not have resumed today when the snow stopped, the sun came out, and traffic and public transport were almost back to normal.

London boroughs had some of the highest rates of school closure today, and in Surrey and Birmingham all schools remained shut. In Kent 195 schools closed, more than the 164 that were shut yesterday, while in Essex more than 400 stayed closed.

"Today in London it is quite sunny and you look out and think 'why is the school closed?'," Mr Balls conceded.

"But last night when the weather forecast was for more very heavy snow, in order to give parents certainty, decisions were made by many local authorities and schools to say they would have to keep the school closed for a second day.

"There is always a balance to be struck and in retrospect maybe the schools could have opened, but I think many parents wanted to plan their arrangements for today and will have been pleased to have had certainty yesterday."

Mr Balls said "They were closed because teachers could not get into schools to open the schools and it was going to be really dangerous for some children trying to make the journeys when there weren't buses or Tubes or trains available and it was very hard to drive".

Functional English: School Snow Days

Reading

Read **document 1** and answer the following questions.

1. Why are our winters usually mild?
2. Where were temperatures 10 degrees higher than normal?
3. List 2 techniques the author has used to get his point across:
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4. Choose one of these techniques and explain how this helps the reader.

Summarising

Read and summarise documents 2 and 3. (300 – 350 words)

Writing

Write an email to your local newspaper expressing your views on whether schools should have closed during the recent bad weather. Back up any statements that you make using key points from the documents. (400 – 500 words)

Functional English criteria

Useful definitions Ofqual (2009), pp3-5.

Reading within Functional Skills qualifications is defined as the independent decoding and understanding of written language and text in a purposeful context.

Speaking, listening and communication within Functional Skills qualifications are defined as non-written communication, normally conducted face-to-face.

Writing within Functional Skills qualifications is defined as the independent construction of written text to communicate in a purposeful context.

Level 2 Skill standard	Level 2 Coverage and range Ofqual (2009), pp12-13.
<p>Speaking, listening and communication Make a range of contributions to discussions in a range of contexts, including those that are unfamiliar, and make effective presentations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider complex information and give a relevant, cogent response in appropriate language Present information and ideas clearly and persuasively to others Adapt contributions to suit audience, purpose and situation Make significant contributions to discussions, taking a range of roles and helping to move discussion forward
<p>Reading Select, read, understand and compare texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select and use different types of texts to obtain and utilise relevant information Read and summarise, succinctly, information/ideas from different sources Identify the purposes of texts and comment on how meaning is conveyed Detect point of view, implicit meaning and/or bias Analyse texts in relation to audience needs and consider suitable responses <p style="text-align: right;">In three or more texts.</p>
<p>Writing Write a range of texts, including extended written documents, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present information/ideas concisely, logically, and persuasively Present information on complex subjects clearly and concisely Use a range of writing styles for different purposes Use a range of sentence structures, including complex sentences, and paragraphs to organise written communication effectively (55-60% assessment weighting) Punctuate written text using commas, apostrophes and inverted commas accurately Ensure written work is fit for purpose and audience, with accurate spelling and grammar that support clear meaning (40-45% assessment weighting) <p style="text-align: right;">In a range of text types.</p>
Level 1 Skill standard	Level 1 Coverage and range Ofqual (2009), pp10-11.
<p>Speaking, listening and communication Take full part in formal and informal discussions and exchanges that include unfamiliar subjects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make relevant and extended contributions to discussions, allowing for and responding to others' input Prepare for and contribute to the formal discussion of ideas and opinions Make different kinds of contributions to discussions Present information/points of view clearly and in appropriate language
<p>Reading Read and understand a range of straightforward texts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the main points and ideas and how they are presented in a variety of texts Read and understand texts in detail Utilise information contained in texts Identify suitable responses to texts <p style="text-align: right;">In more than one type of text.</p>
<p>Writing Write a range of texts to communicate information, ideas and opinions, using formats and styles suitable for their purpose and audience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write clearly and coherently, including an appropriate level of detail Present information in a logical sequence Use language, format and structure suitable for purpose and audience (55-60% assessment weighting) Use correct grammar, including correct and consistent use of tense Ensure written work includes generally accurate punctuation and spelling and that meaning is clear (40-45% assessment weighting) <p style="text-align: right;">In more than one type of text.</p>

References

Ofqual (2009), *Functional Skills criteria for English: Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, level 1 and level 2.*

<http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2009-11-functional-skills-criteria-for-english.pdf>

Further functional skills documents available at <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/2578.aspx>

This resource was kindly contributed by Claire Douglas, Newcastle College, claire.douglas@ncl-coll.ac.uk

Ideal for underpinning L1-L2 Functional English. Also covers many aspects of L1 & L2 Literacy: reading comprehension, writing, summarising.