



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

General Studies A

GENA3

(Specification 2760)

Unit 3: Culture and Society (A2)

Report on the Examination

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GENA3 A2 Culture and Society

General Comments

The paper was again very accessible and there were very few rubric infringements. A few candidates seemed to rush their final essay, but many were able to fill much more than the 12-page booklet provided (not that we are encouraging them necessarily to do that!).

All questions received a range of answers, with Question 08 on social networking being answered by 73% of candidates and Question 09 on freedom and security by only 6.5%. In Section B 06 (travel broadening the mind) was the most popular question.

Section A

The passages proved to be accessible.

Question 01 asked for an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the extracts and too many candidates simply rewrote the extracts – sometimes at considerable length without mentioning a strength or a weakness. Those who were able to refer to strengths and weaknesses of the arguments – the use of language, the bias, the provenance, the evidence, the statistics, the assertions – were able to score marks freely. The skills employed by many candidates were unfortunately not always the ones needed for this particular question. This was something of a disappointment as source evaluation skills are a common feature of various units in this examination.

Question 02 was relatively straightforward. As usual there were some candidates who tried to use both extracts as a basis for their answer but the principle is always that Question 02 is related to the information or area of interest of the extracts but is not dependent on it. There were many who were not able to contextualise their answer because they were not able to understand the notion of an assembly, despite it forming the subject of the law spelt out for them at the opening of the paper and of both extracts. Very few were able to remember their primary school experience. However, there were some thoughtful answers, especially about the possibility of an assembly as a unifying or dividing factor and also as a time for reflection and contemplation. Few were able to refer to the potential moral dimension of assemblies. Those few candidates who talked about religious assemblies outside a school context could also score fully on this question

Candidates should also be aware of the mark allocation for section A. 20 marks in total is less than an essay in Sections B and C. There were cases particularly of very long answers to Question 01 which is worth only 12 marks.

Section B

Section B always covers the cultural themes of the specification and examiners are looking to reward well presented knowledge, arguments, analysis, development, exemplification, illustration and communication. The validity of the conclusions should emerge from the strength of arguments contained within the essay.

Question 03 was popular. Candidates were asked to comment on three possibly related themes – the fall in numbers of candidates for MFL examinations, the dominance of the English language and whether this led to complacency. The best answers were comprehensive and covered the origins of English dominance through Empire; its use in the

USA and particularly the effects of American influence through films and TV; its adoption as an international diplomatic language and language of travel and of popular music. Many were aware that although outstripped by Mandarin and Spanish as a first language, it is likely that there are more speakers of English than any other language. The other factors which were covered widely were perceptions – more or less valid and illustrated – of the difficulty of MFLs at examination level; their exclusion from a list of preferred subjects for University entrance; poor teaching levels; the earlier start in language teaching in foreign schools.

Question 04 about creativity was attempted quite widely, though the mean mark (10.6 out of 25) was the lowest on this section of the paper. Those who found a broader context generally performed well. There were some interesting and comprehensive definitions and a range of both practical and aesthetic examples. For once, football provided some apt analogies. A common fault was missing a discussion on the implication of the question that creativity was predominantly (exclusively) a human characteristic.

Question 05 elicited the best answers in this section, though with a surprisingly low take up. Here 12% of the candidates reached Level 4, some with a dazzling array of examples taken from a wide range of authors and styles to illustrate Twain's dictum in the question and to define a classic novel. A pleasing number of candidates were able to unravel the 2nd implication of Twain, though weaker candidates usually failed to do so.

Question 06 was popular and relatively well managed. The 'broadening of the mind' was not defined as clearly as it might have been but the reference to the 21st century did, as we had hoped, lead candidates to a useful area of comparison between second-hand internet/TV experience of foreign travel and that of first-hand experience. There were some interesting takes on globalisation and multicultural experience.

Section C

Also comprises one choice from four, with more of a social emphasis.

Question 07 was about equality of opportunity. This turned out to be the least well answered essay question and most answers focused on gender and disability. One examiner commented "How times change! There was a time when this would have been one of the most popular questions." Perhaps there are fewer issues now because candidates have accepted equality of opportunity as more of a *fait accompli*. There are still important matters for discussion here and it is still a fundamental part of Citizenship.

Question 08 was very popular and in general well done. The mean mark was in level 3 at 13.2, unusually for a popular question. It was at first sight an obvious question, and one to which many candidates were able to relate. What was pleasing was the wide range of advantages and disadvantages candidates could identify and illustrate as well as the knowledge expressed of such issues as the part played by Twitter and similar platforms in the political unrest in the Middle East. Advantages and shortcomings were often listed in a fairly haphazard manner, but many candidates were able to identify both groups and find common ground between them in a more integrated answer.

Question 9 on the balance between the needs and rights of the individual and the state was the least answered question on the paper. Whether that would have been the case had the examination taken place a few weeks later can only be a matter of speculation. The main weakness was a failure to focus on the security of the state rather than personal safety of citizens. The dilemma between the two issues was, however, often recognised and many candidates were aware of the difficulty in reconciling them.

Question 10

This question (on the balance between our relations with the EU and the US) elicited some of the best answers on the paper, with 13.5% of answers being placed in level 4. 2.5% of essays received full marks. There were some very well-informed and interesting appraisals of the UK's world position and its links with the US and EU and a number of very clear analyses of the pros and cons of each relationship.

I would like to repeat the advice given in earlier reports in this series. Essay skills are vital here and many A-level students appear to have little experience of essays. These skills, and that of the analysis of source material do need to be practised and honed to achieve the highest levels in this examination.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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