



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

General Studies A

GENA3

(Specification 2760)

Unit 3: Culture and Society (A2)

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on **the Examination** are available from: aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2012 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

GENA3 A2 Culture and Society

General Comments

The paper received some very good responses from candidates who wrote intelligently and from a base of sound knowledge. They were able to propose points, develop and illustrate them and to build arguments with great skill and thoroughness.

Of the essays, Question 08 on freedom was the most popular; Question 03 on poetry and prose was the least, but most questions received a good number of answers and there was no dominant essay chosen by a large proportion of candidates. A tiny number of candidates were dismissive of the examination and one or two tried to shock by being offensive. This is not acceptable behaviour and candidates can expect it to be reported back to centres.

Section A

The passages were probably the most accessible we have had. Question 01 was looking for a comparison of the different views expressed in the three extracts. It was difficult to answer this thoroughly without looking at the varied provenance of the extracts and some candidates were able to spot the nuances of language in all three. As always, too many candidates simply described the content of each extract. Occasionally that came with implicit comparisons which examiners tried hard to reward.

Question 02 was also straightforward. The common problem occurred when candidates tried to relate the question entirely to the extracts. Question 02 is always a stand-alone question on the same subject as Question 01 usually soliciting the candidate's own opinions, and it is sometimes, as in this case, difficult to answer the question fully by reference to the relatively narrow source material alone. The question began with the oft-ignored 'How far...' and relatively few candidates were able to point to the essential constitutional question of the Prince's position.

Section B

This section always covers the cultural themes of the specification content 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 not very popular. It offered a two-part provocative prompt that poetry conveys emotion, whereas prose 'merely' gives information. They had to examine the view – which many did – and say how far they believed it to be true. Some well informed (possibly A-level English?) students were able to describe poetry and prose with exemplification but often they were unable to take the step of analysis necessary for a good answer. Others were quite good at analysing the implications of the question but lacked relevant illustration. Hardly anyone took up the challenge of 'merely'.

Question 04 needed criteria. It was not enough to say that criteria cannot be used in any of the art forms, unless it was closely argued and alternative means of judgement were found. Music was by far the weakest area tackled, with little idea of universal aesthetic or technical criteria. Conceptual art produced some superb responses. Too many responses followed the predictable route of 'voting' as in popular TV shows and an interesting number followed

the Oscar awards route without realising that these awards were for different aspects of the cinematic arts which might have offered a useful framework.

Question 05 was quite popular, though the prompt sometimes proved to be a bit of a ‘red herring’. Attempts to describe the work of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport were variable. It was felt that they funded everyone from Premier League footballers to newspapers and TV channels but with little idea (as usual) about what culture was about. There was plenty of reference to the forthcoming Olympics but little of it was well developed.

Question 06 The main difficulty here was describing the Lowest Common Denominator. There was a lot of misinformation about the needs of a variety of class strata. Better answers covered a range of media – newspapers, broadcasting, the internet and some very reasonable answers were predicated on the need for plurality of media outlets – often well described and analysed.

Section C

This section also comprises one choice from four options, with more of a social emphasis.

Question 07 was about the common features of world religions. The discussion and exemplification of a systematic list of issues such as a deity, prayer, worship, building, holy books, afterlife and celebrations could lead candidates to a satisfactory answer. Those who delved deeper into more arcane areas (of matters such as redemption and propitiation or of the purpose and value of each area discussed) were rewarded accordingly. A necessary element of comparison was not always present and a number of candidates tried comparing Roman Catholicism and Christianity somewhere in their account.

Question 08 was very popular and remarkably well done by many. There were some knowledgeable and apposite answers ranging widely over a variety of issues of freedom and restraint taken from a variety of contexts. The extent to which personal freedoms are threatened in the contemporary world were remarkably limited and there were some simplistic answers which betrayed little knowledge of other societies than our own. Similarly, there were some superficial views of what might constitute a freedom. However, there were also some very fine Level 4 answers to this question.

Question 9 was about the coalition government – a relatively straightforward assessment of benefits and difficulties. Considering the 20 months between the election and the examination, many answers gave a little background to the foundation of the coalition, a rant about the Lib Dems selling out over tuition fees and that was as far as their discussion went. Any other thoughts about the intervening time or indeed the other 33 coalition governments in Europe, including Germany, Italy and Ireland (to say nothing of the large numbers in Africa and Asia) were few and far between. Nevertheless, there were excellent examples where the nature of democracy, consensus and political co-operation were discussed and well exemplified.

Question 10 on ethical banking and fair trade was not as often well done as we had expected. The crisis of the morality of banking and bonuses had rather understandably overtaken the initial intention of this question of looking at ethical investment from boardroom to worker in the fields. There were some better answers on the fair trade issue and a number of examples of those who were engaged in fair trade from a variety of ethical (and opportunistic) positions as well as a little finger-pointing at firms whose record had not been good. There were some interesting bits of knowledge – Cadbury’s charging the same price for smaller bars to offset their fair trade credentials and costs – was one which many picked

up. We were surprised by the lack of understanding of too many candidates, who chose to answer a question with insufficient ammunition.

To repeat the advice given in earlier reports in this series: essay skills are vital here and many A level students have little experience of essay work. These skills, and those of the analysis and evaluation of source material do need to be practised and honed to achieve the highest levels in this examination.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

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