



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

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

As usual, there were some excellent answers, argued intelligently and illustrated with apposite examples. At their best the essay writing skills on display were prodigious.

There were others that were, sadly, almost illegible, and a few which demonstrated a contempt for the examination which was inappropriate. Substituting assertion for argument was a common tendency. Many answers offered no evidence to verify the points that the writer was making.

Section A

Question 01 was looking for a comparison and contrast of the two extracts. The first extract was quite complex and many candidates failed to pick up the doubts it expressed about collective worship. Few were able to refer to the provenance of the articles. Many simply paraphrased the extracts – especially Extract A – without really attempting the analysis that was requested. **Question 02** was much better done, though those who tried to relate it to the extracts hampered themselves.

Section B

This section 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. Each of the questions had a good take-up by students, though 03 was the most popular and 06 the least.

Question 03 was attempted widely, but many answers were over-generalised, with much assertion of how important it is to retain one's culture but offering few reasons why. A lack of focus and a lack of illustration were two limiting factors. Many students argued as though the practice of a particular religious faith was the only form of cultural tradition, though on the other hand, many limited their notion of immigrant culture to cuisine.

Question 04 on humour in films elicited some good responses – well-structured, wide-ranging and well-illustrated. Comedy as 'light relief' was a well-examined theme. To be fair to students, the intention that the question should be limited to films made for cinema was broadened by examiners to include other visual media, especially television, though the best attempts were undoubtedly those who stuck to both parts of this question.

Question 05 was quite popular. There were some excellent and balanced essays which referred to – and were knowledgeable about – a range of scenarios from West End theatre to the needs of local community and educational groups who were being threatened by both recession and the perceived necessity to cut subsidies. Those who mentioned local projects whose worth and value could be measured often scored well. Those who saw a simple choice between keeping theatres going OR having an NHS were usually not aware of any nuances within the question. There were some excellent answers which treated the question holistically and explored social, cultural, economic and political facets of the debate.

Question 06 was the least popular question in this section but better students were well able to define Classics and then to argue the question. The strength of their definition and the criteria they offered and the range of their arguments were important factors in the assessment. Other answers were very generalised.

Section C

This section also comprises one choice from four questions set on themes with a more social or political nature.

Question 07 was often managed well. Better responses were well informed about a variety of measures designed to combat terrorism such as detention without charge, stop and search and curtailment of free speech, though there were many who ignored the first part of the question.

Question 08 A lot of weaker students struggled to argue coherently here. Few realised that life's basic necessities (food, water, shelter, education) were not free to all and few realised that the cost of something was not measured simply in monetary terms. There were, however, some personal accounts and factual illustrations which, as one senior examiner put it, 'because of their transparent honesty were not only valid but quite thoughtfully composed.'

Question 9 was the least popular essay question but also the best answered. Some students had an excellent grasp of constitutional and political arguments, of the history of the debate and also of current proposals to reform the House of Lords.

Question 10 was the most popular question on the paper and was relatively well answered. Most students had the sense to structure their answers so that there was a balance of the three aspects of teenage life under consideration. Many were sensible and even altruistic in their desire to postpone the three pleasures *pro bono publico*. There was knowledge of the age limits for the various measures in other countries and even of their efficacy.

I would like to repeat the advice given in all reports in this series. Essay skills are vital here and many A level students seem to have little experience of essays in their other subjects. 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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