



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

General Studies A

GENA4

(Specification 2760)

Unit 4: Science and Society (A2)

Report on the Examination

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GENA4 A2 Science and Society

General Comments

The Case Study theme in this session was *climate change* and this sometimes controversial topic seemed to be well received by most candidates who proved to be quite well-informed about the main issues and showed awareness of key areas of discussion. Generally speaking, the sources were used quite effectively by those who had prepared adequately and who seemed to have had some teaching to the pre-released material. Those who had not prepared well were quickly exposed.

Essay performance was, as is so often the case, variable. Some students write with considerable fluency. They are well-informed, demonstrate analytical skills, argue logically, use examples, have a keen sense of critical awareness and score very high marks.

Other students, despite the choice of essay themes available, continue to struggle. A few seem to find it difficult to fill a single page of A4 – either because of poor time management or, more usually, through the lack of both technique and, crucially, knowledge. More students might benefit by producing a plan in Section B where an essay is required.

Finally, it needs to be said that, in some cases, the quality of handwriting leaves much to be desired. Examiners can mark only what they can read and students can penalise themselves through lack of legibility. If a student has poor handwriting the onus is on individual centres to check with AQA to see if additional support is warranted.

Individual Questions Section A (Case Study)

Question 1

There is no doubt that more students are learning how to score higher marks on what is effectively the data-based question, especially since it was made even more explicit that all the Figures (1–7) in Source A needed to be taken into account.

Crucially, the data must be used to answer the question set (in this case the implications of the data for current and future generations). The strongest students did this bringing together areas (sometimes not uncritically in terms of data validity) such as the nature of climate change, rising CO₂ emissions, melting ice, the consequences of Chinese industrialisation, climate summits, the complex relationships between MEDCs and LEDCs and, in a few cases, the true significance of ‘Climategate’ in terms of media reporting and validity of data. These students moved towards a brief conclusion – necessary to reach the Level 3 mark band – using clearly referenced figures which were confined to data that appeared in Source A.

However, a larger number of students either wrote about the data descriptively – often at considerable length – or tended to use it in rather generalised terms. Sometimes, references to the actual figures in Source A were mostly implicit and this was an important weakness. It should also be noted that, to gain the highest marks, students need to cover most, if not all, of the seven figures that feature in Source A.

Question 2

Students were required to use Sources B and C to consider how far recent climate change summits at Copenhagen and Cancun could be considered a success – although very few students considered the basis on which this judgment could be made and a number failed to differentiate between the outcomes of the two summits.

As was often the case, weaker students tended to write descriptively or generally and a few students seemed to have little familiarity with the pre-released material. Sometimes there was undue concentration on one of the two sources but most students attempted to draw something from both sources.

Level 3 answers offered a more sophisticated approach, not just quoting from the sources but using the quotes as evidence to support their own arguments. The real test for such students was the extent to which they were able to show, in the final analysis, how far the two climate summits could be considered a success and the best answers tended to take both a short and longer term view. It was generally considered that more was achieved at Cancun than Copenhagen but that even the achievements at Cancun needed to be qualified in terms of what was actually likely to happen.

Question 3

In Question 3, students were asked to use information from Source D and their own knowledge to explain why many people do not do enough, as individuals, to take actions which might help to fight against climate change.

Most students were often able to reach a mid-Level 2 mark by identifying factors such as leaving actions to government, laziness, apathy or the feeling that the issue of climate change was such that individual actions were not likely to make any difference. Level 3 answers extended the number of reasons, developed arguments fully and provided more depth of analysis.

Weaknesses in answers were, perhaps surprisingly, an inability to focus on the question of individual actions and, in some cases, an inability either to use Source D or to make explicit references to relevant material within the source.

Question 4

On the whole the question on Prince Charles, climate sceptics and the peddling of pseudo science was not well done. In some cases, students had taken too long answering the first three questions and may well have realised that they needed to get on to their essay from Section B.

More usually it seemed that a worrying number of students did not understand what was meant by 'pseudo science', or 'climate sceptics', or both. Question 4 is always based on the use of the pre-released Source E and the unseen Source F. However, the key terms were introduced in Source E and had students done the preparation they are required to do they would have made themselves familiar with the meaning and use of these terms.

Usually, it was left to the highest scoring students to examine the case made by the Prince of Wales and his supporters (action needed to be taken quickly to tackle the consequences that many associate with climate change) and the minority of climate sceptics who remain unconvinced about the extent to which climate change is based on human actions. The best answers, as always, used supporting evidence from the two sources.

Individual Questions Section B (Essays)

Question 5

This was the most popular of the essay questions although not always the most successfully answered. Weaker answers tended to offer opinion and assertion rather than argument and analysis. Often such answers, though not necessarily brief, had only limited knowledge of the main issues associated with the planned rise in university tuition fees in 2012 and their possible consequences.

Those students who followed the structure that the two parts of the question offered tended to fare better. There was an awareness of attempts to mitigate the rise in fees through the pay-back arrangements or bursaries that might be available. Reducing the number of university places received little support and it was felt that, particularly at a time of economic recession, an increase in taxes to fund university education would be far from popular with taxpayers.

Not surprisingly, most students were aware of the debts that graduates were likely to accumulate at the end of their course although some pointed to the different funding approaches taken by the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament while a few were aware of the possible financial advantages of studying in Europe. It is likely that the full impact of the changes will not emerge for several years but it was clear that a number of young people, and certainly more mature students and those from poorer homes, might well be deterred from applying to university either because of the fear of debt or the thought that a degree is no longer a passport to a job commensurate with the qualification.

Question 6

This question on recent developments in ICT and its impact on business and personal lifestyles offered considerable scope to students and, although this was possibly the least popular question in Section B, most students who did answer it usually did quite well. Weaker answers tended to lack any real knowledge of ICT developments and addressed issues in general terms. Other answers were wide-ranging and sophisticated in their analysis and use of examples.

It was important – as it is in all Section B essays – that both parts of the question were covered as we entered the world of Twitter and trolls. Some answers spent a long time on the first part of the question and then had relatively little to say about the second part other than to make brief references to lack of safeguards against cyber fraud or preventing young people accessing unsuitable sites.

Question 7

Some answers to this question on proposed NHS re-organisation were of exceptional quality especially given some of the complexities involved. Once again, such students used the framework of both parts of the question very well.

Their answers said something, in their introduction, about the background to the NHS and the principles underpinning universal health care in the UK. They queried whether such a service “belonged to another age” and were aware that the NHS is a costly service because of the nature of demand, the growing number of elderly people in the population and advances in medical treatment and technology. The extent to which the service was “over-

managed” was queried and, while most acknowledge some inefficiencies, it was felt that these were inevitable given the comprehensive nature of the services offered.

There were arguments and counter-arguments – always a good sign – over whether doctors should have more of a role in the running of the NHS. It was recognised that they were closer to the needs of patients than most but it was widely believed that they were best employed as clinicians rather than managers and administrators. As for competition, it was felt that this might bring some benefits but a number of students made unfavourable comparisons with health-care provision in the USA.

It was both re-assuring and heartening that, whatever their feelings and conclusions, so many young people were keen to discuss the issues and were often, in a number of cases, to do so in such a capable manner.

Question 8

Examples in support of arguments are always important in Section B and this question about allegations that some retailers in the UK have been selling items at high prices even though production costs in LEDCs are very low specifically asked for examples. Many students noticed this and were able to supply them with a number of well-known high street names – most notably clothes and sportswear retailers and manufacturers – mentioned.

Although some answers tended to be rather generalised, often concentrating on the economics, and sometimes the morality, of sweatshop labour rather than the difficulties of regulating labour conditions in developing countries, many students were well-informed.

Good answers were also realistic in terms of explaining the basis for manufacturing and selling of clothing and the profit motive which drives many industries. They were aware of the fragile state of some economies, the weakness of governments in such countries and, consequently, the power of trans-national corporations although, in the context of morality, few dealt with the power of the consumer not to buy goods produced by exploited workers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **results statistics** page of the AQA Website - <http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html>

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