



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

General Studies B

GENB4

(Specification 2765)

Unit 4: Change

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

Success in this examination (as in all others) depends in the first place upon candidates answering the question that has been asked. It then depends upon their assembling relevant evidence to support the case that they choose to make.

What is this evidence? It is not to be found – or it is not only to be found – in the texts that are provided: these are available to all candidates, so responses that merely re-present this material are not likely to distinguish themselves from others. The evidence that adds value to responses is what the candidates themselves come up with: examples, illustrations, relevant experiences. Those who spend five minutes jotting down four or five such pieces of evidence, after they have understood what the question is asking, and *before they read the text, or texts*, can do themselves a real service.

The candidates who score the highest marks scarcely have need of the texts at all; and none should look to them as their first resort.

Question 1

Even here, candidates need only to be attentive to the text to determine what Kumar's values are. It is one thing to point out that Kumar's preference for small organisations over big ones flies in the face of commonsense economies of scale; it is another to devote paragraphs to the drawbacks of small schools.

Kumar attaches value to simplicity, to meaningful relationships, and to low consumption. Candidates were asked to outline why it might be difficult to live by these values for economic, cultural, and political reasons. They were asked, in addition, why it might be difficult to pass these values on to the next generation. Those candidates who altogether overlooked this part of the question were unlikely to gain higher-level marks.

Candidates had little difficulty identifying economic reasons why a refusal to consume might not be an option: the recession has been an object lesson in the negative consequences for our standard of living of low growth or no growth, and of a collapse in the housing market, and in business confidence. 'Cuts' are not a cause for rejoicing. The graph of consumer durables gave some clues as to the likely impact on our domestic and social culture of a co-ordinated rejection of consumerism – though it was enough to draw one or two key inferences from this graph; the data neither underpinned, nor undermined Kumar's case. Many candidates successfully made the point that much technology makes our lives simpler – that, indeed, this is what technology is for; and that there is no reason why less developed countries than ours should not aspire to enjoy its benefits.

Candidates had a little more difficulty with the political dimension; again, though, it would be enough to know something about the coalition government's and the opposition's commitment to 'growth' and encouragement of consumption to recognise that only the Green Party might choose to promote Kumar's values. And those values do, of course, carry weight as we confront 'limits to growth'. It did no harm to marks at all – on the contrary – to acknowledge the strength of his case; but here it was with the difficulties of following his lead that we were mainly concerned.

Question 2

Perhaps it was the word ‘scientific’ that did it: whatever the reason, this question was the less popular of the two options, though it was generally done well by those who chose it. Both texts supported the assumption in the question that scientific knowledge is a ‘good thing’; no backwash was intended from Question 3 to imply that we might ‘suffer from too much’ of it. The question was: how much knowledge of a scientific kind (not necessarily in astronomy – or ‘astrology’ as some candidates misread it – or agriculture) do we all need now so as to be prepared for an uncertain future.

It led nowhere to argue, as some candidates did, that because we can never know what the future will bring, science is unlikely to equip us to match the hour. It did score marks to recognise that we do not ‘all’ need to be experts; that we can leave much to trained scientists to see us all through – but the hope was that candidates would appreciate that even lay people might be expected to have enough basic scientific understanding to conserve, to recycle, to husband resources, to eat healthily, to take exercise, and, in general, to live as sustainably as possible.

It was not out of order to point out that astronomers might spare us the attentions of a meteorite (though not of a black cloud), or that the future is organic rather than GM; but, on the whole, it was not technical detail that was looked for: ‘Science’ on a General Studies paper will always mean science in the round; science that concerns us all.

Question 3

The question (whether we might suffer from too much knowledge and information in the future or from too little) sat very lightly to the two texts (as it generally does), so it was not wise to spend time and space discussing the issues of adult access to academic education and payment for online news. These were mere pegs: it was up to candidates to supply the clothes.

It was worth making a distinction (as the question did) between knowledge and information since then the point almost made itself that, whilst we are unlikely ever to have too much knowledge at our disposal, we might well be suffocated by gigabytes of information. (It had not been anticipated, incidentally, that the word ‘suffer’ would be taken literally – but as long as too much emphasis was not laid on the *physical* harm that too much information might do – literal interpretations did not suffer a loss of marks).

Many candidates made (often appalled and finger-pointing) reference to the rise in tuition fees at universities as grounds for predicting that knowledge might be rationed in future. On firmer ground, many candidates wondered at the superflux of celebrity ‘news’ stories; at the fog of tweets and blogs in cyberspace; and at the deluge of internet websites in which we come close to drowning when we initiate a simple search. This is the kind of response that was being looked for – and the more specific, and experience-based, and ‘real-world’ it was, the better.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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