

General Studies

Advanced GCE A2 7831

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3831

Reports on the Units

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Chief Examiner's Report

The January session saw a slight increase in the number of candidates taking the General Studies examination and there was no deterioration in the standard of work produced. Principal Examiners reported a pleasing and receptive response to the source materials used and questions set. Many candidates presented answers which were articulate, informed, and erudite, completed with style and panache. In contrast examiners found it difficult to award marks when a candidate simply copied text or described situations when there was a clear indication that development and analysis was required in order to capture marks.

In their reports on the individual units, Principal Examiners have drawn attention to broad trends as well as to detailed points concerning individual questions. Centres are asked to consider the following common ideas and themes:

- 1 Examination questions are set by Principal Examiners with explicit reference to the OCR General Studies specification. Here there is detailed information about the subjects which may be covered by each domain at both AS and A2 levels. It was therefore surprising that, in some cases, there was little evidence of knowledge in certain subject areas. This led to revelations where examiners were able to see whether the candidates had been taught formally or attended an organised course or not. Following from this, some candidates found simple long division difficult in Unit 2962.
- 2 Time management appeared not to be an issue but there are still a significant number of candidates who fail to connect the number of marks available with the number of words needed in an answer. This impacts seriously on the time available if a candidate chooses to write at length for a question worth only 5 marks when ahead lay a Section B essay question worth 40 marks. Here examiners are looking for an extended piece of writing involving an introduction, several exploratory paragraphs followed by the conclusion. It remains a fact that some candidates seem unable to grasp this model and the result is a somewhat disorganised piece of work. Centres are reminded that the ability to communicate successfully through written words is an essential element of any General Studies course or examination.
- 3 Great value is placed a candidate's ability to engage with a topic either by relating a personal view point or challenging the author's ideas by way of presenting a dilemma or contradiction. In this way a candidate displays breadth of thought and maturity – the high mark bands are easily unlocked by balanced and thoughtful essays.

It is hoped that the progress made in recent sessions with regard to the understanding of and accessing of marks from the assessment objectives for General Studies, and the ability to write in a balanced, rational, and informed way, will continue to improve and develop for the remainder of the life of this specification and for the birth of the new General Studies examination which is available for teaching from September 2008.

2961: The Cultural Domain

General Comments

Once again, the January session of General Studies provided some splendid performances from candidates and fewer disgruntled and disenchanting efforts than ever before. It was pleasing to note that some Centres had heeded the advice given in previous reports, namely to plan time carefully and judiciously in the examination room. As a consequence many candidates were able to finish the paper with complete responses though there were exceptions which will be referred to later in the report.

The examination produced a wide range of answers and the overall view of examiners was that candidates were amply stimulated by the given sources in Section A and the subject matter in Section B to be able to use their skills in interesting and constructive ways. It was pleasing to note that there were few examples of slavish copying from or paraphrasing of the sources or essays that were simply narrative. Instead the most common approach was to challenge or support the views expressed and transmit this into a cogent argument.

In Section A, the three pieces of source material provided enough stimuli for a range of answers which included a refreshing selection of the candidates' own personal interpretations rather than simple lifting from the text. The theme was responded to with enthusiasm with there being little evidence of perfunctory efforts and more examples of genuinely honest and polished presentations. It appears that the subject matter was accessible to most and many scripts contained thoughtful and respectful ideas with solutions to the problems and dilemmas posed by the range of different questions relating to the experiences of three different people.

The paper posed some challenges and candidates, in the main, rose to these, not by providing simple repetition of facts but by extending and developing ideas. In this way, candidates were able to pick up the extra marks available in each question as well as marks for communication (question 2 e). Though most had appreciated that, in question 1, three ideas connected to the phrase scored three marks, this was less noticeable in question 2 where some of the answers were disproportionately long considering the mark tariff available. This impacted on candidates' essay answers which, in this case, were disappointingly brief as time ticked away.

In Section B, questions 3 and 5 proved most popular as candidates truly believe themselves to be experts in education and any aspect of the media. Sadly, this is not the case. There was a certain naivety in some of the responses which betrayed youth and lack of experience. For example, 'there are fewer and fewer radio stations because of the developments in television' is clearly not the case. To use this premise as the basis for an essay saw marks rapidly disappear, candidates' relative success being supported by marks gained in Section A.

Time management was not really a key issue in this session as candidates seemed able to complete the response. Indeed there was some clear evidence that some Centres had taught their candidates and prepared them in detail for the task of answering in AS level General Studies – a most creditable achievement and very pleasing for the examining team. Though the standard of written communication remains satisfactory there is a definite need for Centres to provide candidates with a template structure for the answering of essays in Section B. So many candidates failed to reach the higher mark bands due to disorganised essays which failed to cover the question rubric or make an impact on the reader.

It appears that the subject matter was accessible to most and for the most part, scripts contained thoughtful and respectful ideas and solutions to the problems and dilemmas posed by the range of different questions. The essays set out challenges and candidates, in the main, rose to these, not by providing simple repetition of facts but by extending and developing ideas.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

- 1 The question asks the candidates what *they understand* by the following terms. This opens the door to a purely personal response or does allow them to refer to the passage. Examiners were not looking for precise definitions but suggestions that were plausible and helpful in understanding the word(s). Therefore
- (a) the idea of looking around the stalls at the market in a leisurely way could have the notion of without pressure or being under no obligation added to it. This was generally answered well from personal experience of shopping. However, there were a proportion of candidates who provided perfectly correct answers which described browsing in the context of the internet.
 - (b) Surprisingly many candidates fell one mark short of the total here by failing to elaborate on the idea of the Christmas experience – so many supporting answers could have been given. Often missing was the concept that for many people, Christmas is unique.
 - (c) This was generally answered well as candidates included the idea of an electronic process involving different types of technology and the notion of transfer from one source to another.
 - (d) Again quite well answered if taken at its face value but there was scope to include the fact that the shops may be the same but the experience different (without the involvement of salespersons). Candidates were awarded a mark for mentioning e-shops exclusive to the internet High Street such as EBay or Amazon or noting that internet shops usually were able to offer a wider range of products.
 - (e) To gain high marks it was natural to offer an example of unsocial hours or possibly support this with a job that involves unsocial hours. Many failed to make the connection that the very nature of being *unsocial* meant that life becomes difficult and a strain.

TOTAL: 15 marks

- 2 It has been the theme of many reports and Inset courses that candidates should be taught how to read a question, not just for its intrinsic content, but also for physical construction. For example if a question asks for *two items* and there are *four marks* then one can assume that the examiner is looking to award *two marks for each item – one for a description* and a *second for support* which should clinch the answer. Some candidates could have scored many more marks if they had adopted this approach whereas, conversely, many candidates wrote disproportionately long responses when so few marks were available.

CASE 1

- (a) The two elements of John's attitude could be positive or negative. For example, he loves the Christmas season (being there in amongst the atmosphere) but can see the value of shopping on the internet at home in order to avoid the bustle.
- (b) This was well answered and clearly supported, usually as a result of positive personal experience which related to the candidates own elderly parents or grandparents.

CASE 2

- (c) Again a well answered question possibly as a result of candidates' own experience or because of the excessive publicity and reporting of cases of personal money fraud and identity theft over the last year. In fact the positive answers provided a clear indictment

that it is possible for candidates to assimilate information learned from their life experience and use it positively in a General Studies examination.

- (d) Very well answered. It was sometimes easy for an excellent answer to fail to pick up all marks as a result of the candidate not developing the response for the second mark, for example: *An advantage would be that on-line there is a very large amount of stock (1), from many sources and countries, which it would be impossible to have available in a High Street store due to restricted space (1).*

CASE 3

- (e) There appeared to be three common themes which candidates seized upon; health problems, debt problems, and social problems. With fifteen marks available it was clear that each problem would need to be developed in order to gain maximum marks. The question also asked for own words and there were many examples of lifting directly from the source. This was clearly an opportunity for more extensive and fluent writing, an opportunity to demonstrate communication skills which was accomplished with varying success largely due to a lack of development of the problems.

TOTAL: 35 marks

Section B

- 3(a) Many candidates missed the point about *developing the beliefs and values of students*. *Teambuilding, financial management, parenting and nutrition* were amongst some of the original ideas put forth. However, examiners were disappointed when candidates could do little more than suggest a 're-vamp' of subject already part of the curriculum like *religion and music appreciation*. The question differentiated well between generalisations, innovative and well-illustrated schemes e.g. *car maintenance* – relevant to young people with an increasing number of cars and the need to encourage a responsible civil attitude.
- 3(b) There was evidence of a distinct criticism of the inability of many schools and colleges to provide life-skill experience at an acceptable and relevant level. Therefore it seemed that there were many imbalanced essays which concentrated on the celebration of school's academic achievements and value. The main debate seemed to focus around the relative responsibilities of schools and parents and who should do what. There was plenty of personal experience to relate from candidates' own lives which extended the number of marks on offer if this was closely related to living as well as learning.
- 4(a) Candidates seemed more confident and equipped to cope with the phrase cultural groups and could isolate a number of popular ways such as: dress, cuisine, style of worship. It was pleasing to see that the identification of cultural groups extended further away from simple reference to ethnic cultures. Goths and chavs were very popular. The ability to quote examples to support ideas usually saw marks move into the higher bands.
- 4(b) The definition of a minority culture proved a problem for some. Examiners were pleased with candidates' restraint in answering such a sensitive question and it was interesting to note that many candidates acknowledge that integration is both working and successful. Some essays stepped too far into the Social Domain by basing a large part of the answer on government and EU immigration rules and policy however, one really polished answer referred to the dilemma facing Muslims who have British and Muslim identities. To simply discuss the rights and wrongs of what is happening failed to exploit the main issues of the question.

- 5(a)** Answers to this very popular question were spoiled by a failure to focus on the concept of *local* radio. The key areas identified for special mention were weather, traffic, local events, and a sense of community. If a candidate related this to their own local radio station then it was easy to reach the high mark bands.
- 5(b)** In the second part of the most popular question the standard of answers varied considerably. Some offered the essence of what's on radio (mostly music) but failed to make the case for radio's position. In a number of essays, the candidate compared the versatility of television to radio and all but made audio broadcasting obsolete. Candidates offering a little more thought to the case should have been able to see radio's strong position in that it is free, can broadcast almost anywhere, is of the highest quality (DAB), is less technically complex, cheaper, and relatively easy to access. Some candidates did defend radio and saw how the advent of DAB technology had seen an increase in the number of radio stations rather than a decrease. They were able to see its value to those at work or on the move, its appeal to older people and to the middle classes and also the popularity of radio amongst the young.

In part a) candidates were able to access Bands 1 and 2 (7 – 10 marks) by simply following the question rubric closely and providing the correct number of responses with supporting material. For example, 'three new topics to add to the school or college curriculum' requires three key points or issues supported by two additional pieces of information or examples. In some cases, candidates did not exceed Band 4 as they simply named points and offered no support.

TOTAL for Section B part a) questions: 10 marks

In part b) candidates are awarded credit for not only providing appropriate and relevant knowledge but also for supporting this with analysis and examples which make the information more relevant to the question and secure for the reader to believe and respond to. This can be done by offering a personal experience or a case study or simply challenging the validity of the notion presented. Candidates were securely awarded Band 1 or 2 (31 – 40 marks) when the essay met the demands of the question and the candidate explained and developed their reasoning. Essays awarded Band 4 or 5 (1 – 24 marks) displayed little of this extended thinking and consisted of a chain of facts, sometimes inaccurate with assertive sometimes inaccurate supporting material and few examples.

TOTAL for Section B part b) questions: 40 marks

2962: The Scientific Domain

General comments

Overall this paper was well received by both candidates and centres. Each of the Section A questions was accessible to the majority of candidates and almost unusually there was a reasonably even spread of selections from section B. Although marks in excess of 90% were rare, the paper generated a wide range of marks from 10% to 85%.

Although the majority of candidates used their time quite well, there is still a tendency for a significant number to spend too much time on section A, thereby jeopardising a good performance in Section B. Fortunately there were few instances of candidates answering more than one question from Section B.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Question 1

Responses to this transport based question were somewhat uneven. For the most part, better marks were achieved in parts a) iii and c), and worst in part b).

- (a) It is a matter of concern that a significant number of candidates could not perform the simple calculations in parts i) and ii). They involved quite basic skills and not complex abstract mathematics. Some treated the calculation in part i) as a decimal and interpreted a correct initial calculation of 5.5 as 5 hours and 50 or 5 minutes, rather than 5 hours and 30 minutes; other errors included 330 minutes or were simply hopelessly incorrect. Whilst part ii) was better answered there were still some inaccuracies. It seems that approximately 25% of the entry found $^{220}/_{40}$ and $^{220}/_{25}$ difficult to complete successfully.

Part iii) was however well answered. Most interpreted the stages in the time-distance graph correctly. Common errors usually involved regarding stage Q as stationary and not differentiating between the rates of acceleration in stages P and S.

- (b) Overall this part was quite poorly answered. Instead of describing the characteristics of the respective stages in the journeys, candidates were more inclined to repeat the question by stating in a variety of ways that A and C were the same and that journeys 1 and 2 were different. Although a significant number of candidates were successful in their interpretations, many were unable to translate the graphs in to what actually happened on the journeys in terms of speed, distance routes through urban areas, country roads and motorways/dual carriageways.
- (c) Many candidates engaged enthusiastically with part c). The table proved to be something they could relate to and about which extensive knowledge was displayed. Unfortunately some candidates spent too much time on this task and wrote far too much. Whilst many candidates achieved the full 8 marks available, the most common errors were the failure of candidates to select one car and to refer to factors that were not in the table.

Question 2

Scientific modelling, in this case 'The Scientific Method' has been a topic that candidates have found difficult in the past. However, the format of the question this session has proven to be much more accessible. By providing a topic and structure for the investigation, candidates were able to display more knowledge and skill and therefore were able to access more marks than in previous examinations.

Nearly all candidate responses used the given structure with some utilising continuous prose and others breaking their answers up in to clearly labelled sections. There was a little unevenness in the coverage with stages 2 and 3 (methods and results) frequently being stronger than the others. Very few candidates regarded feedback as being a stage in scientific method.

Overall question 2 was answered well by candidates.

- Most were able to reconstruct the topic description in to a hypothesis and with some even referring to a null hypothesis. Very few candidates went beyond the hypothesis to introduce the theory and general ideas underpinning the experiment.
- The methodology was frequently well described with many candidates achieving the maximum marks for this. Although many concerned themselves with equipment, plants and a controlled greenhouse environment, a small number developed field techniques.
- Most candidates either mentioned or drew tables and graphs as mechanisms for displaying the results. Invariably this was supported with an invented description of the results.
- The final sections were quite varied in quality. There were some excellent conclusions that capably drew together the results and referred back to the initial hypothesis. For the most part evaluative statements mentioned flaws in the experiment and how it could be improved. Very often the feedback, which is such an important feature of scientific research, was either incorporated into the evaluation or absent.

Most candidates did draw upon their own experiences from GCSE science and there were very few wholly generic answers.

Question 3

This proved to be a moderately popular choice and one which some candidates did not find easy. In the majority of cases the quality of attainment across parts a) and b) was similar.

- (a) Fig.4 comprised a standard model that uses birth rates and death rates to project three scenarios for population growth. Whilst plenty of general reasons were given, a significant number of candidates failed to explain the projections in terms of the interactions in changes to the birth and death rates e.g. the projection for x is based on the birth rate being significantly higher than the death rate. Those candidates who had some knowledge of the demographic transition model (page 41 Advanced General Studies for OCR) should have coped with birth and deaths rates as well as provide appropriate explanations.

A small number of candidates completely ignored the title to Fig 4 which stated 'global population change' and dwelt on immigration Unless planet Earth is receiving migrants from Mars many of these answers became irrelevant.

(b) The section on managing population size was reasonably well answered.

The highest quality answers were achieved by candidates who developed four strands:

- the contrast between developed (MEDC's) and developing countries (LEDC's)
- that whilst some nations try to reduce their population others may attempt to increase their populations
- population change can be achieved through strategies affecting both birth rates and death rates
- a nation's population size can be influenced by emigration and immigration
- the majority of answers dwelt on birth control, education and China with its one child policy. Other exemplar material was drawn from the UK Sweden, Italy and Africa (unfortunately many regard Africa as a country rather than a continent).

Question 4

Question 4 was marginally the most popular question. The role of zoos and wildlife, followed by the photographic prompt material, proved to be an attractive choice. Those candidates who developed clear scientific reasoning for both a) and b), generally did well. As expected, many candidates used non-scientific reasons in both parts and as a consequence their answers were flawed.

- (a)** Scientific reasons for zoos and wildlife parks include; species preservation, breeding studies in anatomy and pathology, veterinary medicine, science education etc. Most candidates were able to identify such reasons and the quality of their answers depended on the level of elaboration. Poor quality answers either failed to give four reasons or wrote about holidays, pretty animals etc without mention of science.
- (b)** Although it was a little disappointing that only a small number of candidates made direct reference to the splendid Rain Forest images, there were some implicit references. Most candidates were able to produce a reasonable essay based on descriptions of animal habitats, medicinal plants and the reduction of global warming. High quality answers mentioned anthropological reasons such as 'lost tribes', localised climatic change and managing the Earth's oxygen/carbon dioxide balance.

Needless to say, a small number of candidates ignored the question's requirement of assessing reasons for conservation and opted for descriptions of conservation measures. Finally it is worth stating that once again some candidates commented on global warming being caused by heat getting through a hole on the ozone layer. It might be worthwhile suggesting that one current theory is that the cooling produced by ozone depletion might compensate for the warming contributed to by greenhouse gases.

Many answers would have been improved by mentioning some ecological principles such as productivity, nutrient recycling and the inter-relationships of organisms, much of which appears in GCSE Science and Geography.

Question 5

Although marginally the least popular in Section B, question 5 was generally well answered by those choosing it. The objective of part a) was to turn the topic of scientific development around and invite candidates to comment upon why such developments occur; food, the atmosphere

and electricity are sufficiently broad to achieve this objective. The essay on the contribution of scientists (therefore science) to increasing life expectancy formed a development of part a.

- (a)** Although rarely achieving the full 10 marks this question was generally well answered. The most common links being: food and obesity, atmosphere and greenhouse gases, electricity and the need for alternative energy. Although clear problems were often given, their connection to scientific research was not always made explicit.
- (b)** This question gave candidates the opportunity to explore a wide range of areas. Most answers focused on a range of medical advances with the better candidates identifying: faulty genes, diagnostic tools (e.g. scanners), equipment such as dialysis machines and procedures such as transplants as well as vaccines and other medications. It was pleasing that many candidates realised that increasing life expectancy could also be achieved through industrial developments e.g. car safety, advances in physical fitness, diet and research into the effect of smoking, alcohol and drug abuse.

2964: The Social Domain 1

General Comments

Examiners regarded this paper as being fair and appropriate to AS standard, and of similar demand to the candidates as previous papers in this domain. It was pleasing to note that only a minority of candidates made either no attempt or a very cursory attempt at the questions. Similarly in Section B, there were few rubric infringements, and there were few flippant answers, or complaints of the ‘why do I have to do this?’ type.

Few candidates showed evidence of problems with time management, such as rushed Section B’s with either extended plans or bullet points for answers. Some Centres clearly encouraged candidates to do Section B first on the grounds that it is easier to do Section A quickly if time should become an issue. There is no reason why this should not happen, and more Centres may wish to consider use of this strategy.

Handwriting was an issue in a very few cases, but examiners identified an increasing use of sloppy slang expressions, over-casual phrasing, such as ‘hacked off’ for angry, and the use of ‘text-speak’, though instances of offensive phraseology or vocabulary were rare. This tended to be evident in occasional answers to question 3a) on EU immigration.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Question 1

One examiner commented that the majority of candidates could reasonably be assumed to have achieved a Grade C in English recently. For this reason the number of candidates misunderstanding the poem was disappointing.

- (a) (i) Most picked up the point that Betjeman was welcoming the bombs and appreciated the irony/oxymoron involved, though some confused it with ‘friendly fire’. The candidate who suggested that Betjeman sounded like a German name, and that he was there fore a Nazi agent, may have known that Betjeman was bullied at school during WW1 for supposed German connections – but then again he may not!
- (ii) Most candidates got the metaphor of ‘tinned mines’ as being restricted, or unquestioning, but few developed this to 3 marks by reference to their work or living circumstances.
- (iii) “Bogus Tudor bars” led to some flights of fantasy, though the majority scored at least 1 mark for the idea of falseness. The candidates who referred to ‘themed pubs’ or ‘stockbrokers’ Tudor architecture’ were rare but well rewarded.
- (iv) This was generally the poorest part of this Section. Many candidates failed to pick up the clear reference to ‘hairdryers’ and many went falsely into the realms of pollution.

- (b) Despite the clear instructions, many candidates did not write about ‘A town known to you’ and instead tried to write about Slough, using Betjeman’s material. Others wrote about unspecified towns with features that they imagined he would approve/disapprove of. The best answers were clearly rooted in local knowledge and scored well. Some compared good and bad points of their own town, while others compared nearby but contrasting settlements. Cities and large villages were accepted, but Cornwall, Yorkshire and Iraq were not.

Question 2

This question took the form of a draft survey concerning the closure of a hospital, and the candidates were asked to propose improvements to its effect, appearance and layout. Many candidates were clearly familiar with the construction of surveys, having possibly composed them in other subject areas, and were very well versed in the use of confidentiality, open and closed questions, leading questions, and the need to gather information that could be easily tabulated and analysed by the originators. Consequently, it was pleasing to note there were many high-scores awarded in this question.

Weaker candidates tended to concentrate on the format of the form, rather than the content. They commented on the relative size of the boxes, absence of logo of the hospitals or contact number, and in some cases, the lack of ‘Thank you for completing this form’. While having *some* validity, these were considered to be less crucial than questions concerning access, waiting times, and overall experience of treatment, and better candidates reflected this balance.

A minority of candidates completely re-designed the form – usually to no great advantage. There were occasional infringements of the rubric, in that more than five amendments were offered.

Question 3

With about 75% of candidates opting to answer this question, it was by far the most popular choice. As a consequence, examiners observed a full range of responses.

- (a) The clear question here was on government policy – that is, why the government might encourage EU immigration. There are several issues here, which were picked up by the best candidates, so there were many instances of maximum marks.

However, some candidates chose to focus in the benefits to the migrants, and this generated a minority of cases, some spleen against all immigration, not necessarily just the EU. Benefits to migrants were disallowed. AO2 occasionally suffered here, as passion overtook rationality.

- (b) The majority of candidates had something worthwhile to say here, though there was a great deal of assertion and stereotyping. Quite a number of candidates, already in part-time employment, evidenced a good degree of AO4. (personal experience)

Candidates knew some basic material, but assessment was frequently hindered by reversing the question, and talking (sometimes exclusively) about the *disadvantages* of each age group, which while possibly relevant, was not strictly answering the question.

Many factors were evidenced. There were few examples of prejudice against the elderly trying either to supplement inadequate pensions, or keeping their involvement with the workforce. B&Q was frequently held up as an example of a good employer for its non-ageist practices.

Question 4

This was the least popular question. Candidates were sometimes seduced in to it by the comparative ease of Section A, which simply asked for four reasons why supermarkets dominate the marketplace. However, having done this, many were stumped by the quite tricky demands of Section B.

Section B required candidates to determine firstly, which items of provision are services, and secondly, which are best suited to local or national provision.

Most candidates simply picked four services and justified them at either local or national scale. Some identified areas such as taxation, which were strictly neither. Answers tended to be brief and disturbingly unaware of how our system of provision operates. However, at the upper end of the mark range there were some sophisticated answers, which realised that some services could well operate at both an over-arching national level and a more diminutive local level. These answers, well exemplified, were awarded high marks.

Question 5

This question attracted the specialist politics students, and was by and large well done.

- (a) Most candidates identified with the increasing sophistication of the electorate in seeking resolutions, at least at the local level, outside the main political parties. There was some good exemplification, and Centres across the country, drew an interesting 'map' of how minority parties may be operating there.
- (b) The emphasis here was an increasing percentage of voters. While the best candidates addressed both issues, often with considerable vehemence on the former, most concentrated on increasing the turnout. Some of their ideas (internet voting/compulsory voting) were commonplace, but in general, candidates seemed unaware of the possible drawbacks. Better candidates focused on the more concrete aspects, including the need for politicians of all parties to re-connect at a *genuine* level, and not just the sound byte of the present Brown-Cameron-Clegg regime, with the people – particularly young voters – of the UK.

2965: The Scientific & Cultural Domains

General Comments

The paper retained its current format where candidates were allowed one and half hours to answer two questions. One question from three needed to be chosen in Section A, the Science Domain and one from three in Section B, the Cultural Domain. Very few candidates failed to follow this rubric, although a significant number showed poor time management and were unable to complete their second question satisfactorily.

A tapered mark scheme introduced last year was used but further modified in order to retain the current A threshold that is close to 80% and bring the mark for those on the E borderline nearer to 40%. This modified scheme can be viewed more closely in the published mark scheme. The 80% and 40% marks are the planned targets for unit performance and reduce the degree of adjustment required when marks are transferred to the unified mark scheme.

Overall performance

The paper appears to have been of an appropriate level of difficulty and to have differentiated successfully in most Centres. Many candidates addressed the questions with enthusiasm and rigour developing their answers using knowledge and understanding from their specialist areas and embellishing them with their own experiences. This was particularly apparent in question 5 where candidates drew on their personal experiences as musicians in bands and orchestras to illustrate ways in which they had come to a better understanding of the creative process. It is good to discover that the joy of playing your own instrument is perhaps not a dying art amongst the young.

There appears however, to have been a significant number of Centres where the overall performance was very disappointing. What can only be described as low motivation produced brief, uneven answers which sometimes bordered on flippancy; some candidates complained of little or no formal training for the General Studies examination.

In the **Scientific Domain** the vast majority of candidates answered Q1 or Q3. Q2 was infrequently attempted which was a pity as it offered the candidate a very clear structure. It would be sad to think that ignorance or indifference to the role of peace-keeping might have been a significant deterrent.

In the **Cultural Domain** Q4 was unexpectedly the most popular with well over half the candidates attempting it. It is disappointing that Q5 and Q6 proved equally daunting to most when both questions inspired some of the best and most interesting essays of the paper.

For many candidates their ability to communicate, write legibly and use spelling, punctuation and grammar with facility continues to show the improvement noted in recent reports. Amongst many weaker candidates however, there remains room for considerable improvement particularly with respect to spelling.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 This was a popular question addressed by candidates of all abilities. Successful answers showed a balance of positive and negative assessment and a mature evaluation of the inevitable problem of funding. The majority however were unbalanced focusing on negative criticism with little supporting evidence. Many were distracted by prejudices regarding access to the NHS. Overall the majority of candidates by whatever route reached a positive conclusion.
- 2 The least popular question in this section, despite offering the clearest template for a response. Only a few candidates were able to offer a coherent answer across all parts of the question.

Perhaps candidates, as encouraged in past reports should have devoted time in their introduction to identifying key terms; defining the crucial idea of 'peace keeping' might have been beneficial.

The most successful chose 'atomic power' (a) or 'telecommunications' (c) and were able to provide sufficient justification or rejection (whichever was adopted) as the prime contributor. Nearly all however found difficulties with 'b' 'fertilisers and high yielding seed varieties'. Very few had any real understanding of the terms let alone a relationship to peace-keeping.

- 3 Questions on the environment are always popular and this proved to be the second most popular question in this section. There was a very wide range of responses, mainly due to candidates not reading the question carefully and recognising its primary focus. This was not a question focused on strategies to achieve a greener future but about the outcomes of adopting such strategies. Too many answers discussed for example, the advantages and disadvantages of their local recycling programme without establishing why this might have purposeful outcomes in the future.

Good responses identified the aims of a 'greener future' in the introduction, then used a strategy such as reducing carbon dioxide emissions through cleaner cars or renewable energy sources to assess the outcome in terms of economic and social sustainability at the local, national and global scales.

Misconceptions still continue at all levels regarding global warming, greenhouse gases and holes in the ozone layer. Past reports have drawn attention to these important misunderstandings.

- 4 Probably the most popular question on the paper but only a minority had sufficient background knowledge of religious tenets and their application to everyday life to assess the notion of substituting them with the ideas of hedonism. This is surprising given the explicit references to 'substitution' in the specification. The question stem provided four ways of thinking about hedonism. Too many used these as an ultimate definition and narrowly reflected on possible outcomes in every day life. Such responses completely omitted any reference to a religious context.

Some literate well read candidates became too elaborate in trying to explain the complexities of the match between hedonism and religion. They were guilty of losing sight of the important context established by the question 'the role in everyday life'. There were those however who read the question carefully noting the key commands, showed a clear understanding of the purposes of hedonism and the roles for religion in everyday life, and then lucidly assessed the matching of the two areas with a view to substitution. Some of these were outstanding essays which examiners found a pleasure to read.

- 5 This was a popular question in some centres, but one that demanded careful thought in structuring the answer. Good answers gave a range of creative people, described their work and explained what the candidate had learned about the creative process. Reference was made to a wide range of creative people, popular choices included Shakespeare, Austen, Rowling, Banksey and from sport Ronaldo. Many candidates were able to draw on their own creative work to add an extra dimension to their essay. Unfortunately too many answers simply listed creative people with some reference to their work but little evaluation of their impact on enhancing the candidate's notion of the creative process.

Quality responses to this question were both thought provoking and a pleasure to read.

- 6 Again the popularity of this question depended on the Centre. The mark scheme identified two parts to the question, the ways in which creative people help us to cope with reality and an assessment of these ways. Better candidates identified a number of ways, with most focusing on positives such as escaping stress, relaxing and finding comfort in emotional turmoil caused by death in the family or a break-up with a loved one. Such responses were also able to identify sources of comfort the most popular being musicians both popular and classical, frequently quoting specific lyrics that had provided comfort and relief. Literature, art, film and TV soaps were other sources that were developed.

Assessment was less secure though some made excellent use of personal experiences. Weak responses simply focused on escapism with only vague reference to how creative people helped. Sitting down in front of any television programme was a very common way of escaping reality. Most tended to ignore the need to assess the ways.

Good essays however were among the most interesting and enjoyable to read on the paper.

2966: The Social Domain 2

General comments

Examiners felt the level of difficulty of the paper was appropriate to the ability range of the candidates. The level of performance overall was found to be satisfactory, with the reservation that fewer essays reached a clear Band 1 standard than in previous sessions. It was felt that perhaps this shortcoming owed something to a lack of detailed development in discursive essays.

It was further noted that there was a marked difference between the attainment of candidates who had evidently been taught and prepared for the examination and those who had been entered with little or no focused preparation. This remains a major factor in the difference between Centres. Where there is a clear value placed on the subject by the institution, candidates produce well-informed and fluently written responses. This remains true across a wide ability range – candidates of modest understanding can offer thoughtful and thought-provoking responses.

There was considerable evidence of candidates' willingness to engage with the complex arguments of questions 3 and 4. Better candidates moved away from partially-supported assertions to produce work showing genuine understanding of the complex and many-sided issues involved. This was often signified by candidates' reluctance, following a detailed and balanced argument, to draw a firm conclusion.

Generally, answers were well organised and clearly written, although the disappearance of the possessive apostrophe continues apace. Similarly, there was much confusion between *effect* and *affect*, and many weaker candidates' performances were also affected by haphazard spelling. Examiners generally felt that although general essay structure has improved, vocabulary has not.

Most candidates seemed to have managed their time successfully, and there were very few mis-readings of the rubric. Facetious and/or offensive material was also, happily, rare.

Poor examination technique accounted for some underperformance. This applied especially to question 1b), where some candidates wrote lengthy answers. A single tightly-focused paragraph – worth a maximum of five marks - was required. Such candidates need to look at the mark allocations for part-questions and tailor their answers accordingly. This is a particular concern where later questions requiring a discursive answer are skimmed for lack of time wasted on writing excessively on answers in the early part of the examination, that were worth few marks.

Finally, it is worth noting that the adjective "general" in *General Studies* implies both width and depth in the knowledge base required to under-pin successful answers. A common theme in colleagues' reports on their centres was a lack of focus in the application of candidates' knowledge to structuring their answers. When allied to a failure thoroughly to read questions and appreciate their full implications, this accounted for a significant number of candidates performing less well than might have been expected.

This paper was seen as being a thought provoking and challenging one, in which candidates engaged effectively with both its compulsory and optional elements. Although weak candidates, as always, struggled with the deeper implications of the questions, very few appeared to offer an answer.

Comments on individual questions

Question One

Examiners felt that this was an interesting and revealing question, and the responses to it generally suggested that candidates found much in it to engage their interest. In particular, many expressed varying degrees of surprise at the survey results – surprise sometimes expressed with a degree of resentment.

Part 1a) of this question was mostly well answered, although part b often consisted of descriptions of the function of organisations such as *Tesco* or the *News Corporation of America* rather than an account of how these organisations affect our daily lives. Gaining full marks for this question required a short evaluative development which many candidates failed to supply.

Writing a successful answer to 1c meant that candidates needed to be able to distinguish between influence, power and control. A number of candidates misread the survey's title *Who Runs Britain?* and wrote essays suggesting that Rupert Murdoch, Terry Leahy or Google actually possessed substantive political or executive power in the UK above and beyond their commercial influence.

More perceptive candidates realised that *Who Runs Britain?* was just an eye-catching headline. They wrote clearly structured essays which demonstrated the clear difference between how people perceive influence and those who wield it, and how it actually works.

Many candidates seemed to have at best a haphazard idea of the relationship between the British people, the Houses of Parliament and Ministers of the Crown. In particular, they were inclined to assign more personal power to offices such as the Prime Minister or the Exchequer than they actually possess, thus mis-reading the relationship, crucial to the question, between power and influence.

Some candidates also expressed surprise and dismay that neither the Queen nor the Royal Family featured in the survey, and of these a number went on to discuss quite ably the sovereignty of the UK against the background of our growing political engagement with the EU. Answers of this sophistication were rare but a pleasure to read.

A source based question offers weaker candidates the opportunity to base their answers on it more or less entirely, and many duly did this. Such answers had the merit of a clear narrative structure, but the accompanying analysis was often a matter of simple comment with little development. Likewise, some candidates spoiled quite effective answers by failing to engage with the requirement to evaluate positive and negative implications. Answers such as these often found examiners working harder than the candidates.

Question Two

This was the least popular question but tended to provide good answers. Coverage of the first part of the question tended to be more effective than that of the second.

The question dealt with active political commitment rather than voting behaviour, and concentration on such matters as electoral turnout often weakened the focus of otherwise quite effective answers. Good candidates, on the other hand, made a clear distinction between voting behaviour and active party membership. They saw the latter as the context in which the former has declined. Other candidates assumed that active party members were actually professional politicians rather than their supporters.

Most were able to identify elements of dissatisfaction through such issues as the movement of political parties to the centre ground, the personalisation of politics, the culture of spin and the continuing evidence of political sleaze. They were less strong on replacement ideologies and tended to write about domestic distractions rather than how people were political in new ways, or influenced by such trends as the cult of celebrity.

The best answers did discuss pressure groups and did see how effective they were as alternatives, replacing a generalised political ideology with a focused support for single issue organisations. Other answers wrote knowledgeably of the replacement of political ideology by religious affiliations with social or political outreach.

Question Three

An examining colleague wrote, *apropos* question two, that the *lack of political, social and historical knowledge of a large percentage of candidates is to be bemoaned, especially in contrast to their in-depth knowledge of reality shows*. In fact, such in-depth knowledge would have aided many candidates who attempted question three, which was the most popular. As it was, many weaker candidates were able only to offer a superficial narrative discussion of such television programmes as *Big Brother*, and made only passing reference to the other entertainments listed in the question.

The range in the quality of answers to this question was enormous. Some were absolutely superb, drawing on an impressive knowledge of past and present forms of entertainment. More importantly, they were able to make explicit links between the four forms of 'entertainment' specified, and to offer perceptive commentary on the societies they entertained. In other words, the best answers (as so often) came from those who read the question carefully, and planned an answer which explored all its aspects.

, Candidates' main error of judgement was to concentrate on one aspect only without placing it in the context offered by the rest of the question. But even here, some candidates showed an impressive grasp of the nature of the medium, and what happens to reality when it is reflected in society's distorting mirror.

Question Four

This was seen by colleagues as the most difficult of the optional questions. It is surprising therefore that it was also a popular one, and elicited some strong and clearly focused answers. The deliberately wide range of the question offered candidates the chance to engage with a complex issue from a number of perspectives, and many good candidates seized the opportunity with relish.

Despite the fact that this issue is still a live controversy, which arouses strong feelings on all sides, candidates were able to put aside their personal feelings to make way for healthy and relatively objective debate.

In terms of coverage, most candidates found it easier to engage with moral and ethical issues than legal ones. Some less able candidates found it hard to maintain their focus, drifting into a debate on the pros and cons of gay adoption or indeed homosexuality itself. What was encouraging was a democratic spirit which underlay many answers, even to the extent of recognising that all the parties involved hold their views sincerely and are, what is more, entitled to do so.

Of all the optional questions this was also the one which required the soundest knowledge base. It was useful, for example, to be able to distinguish between scriptural and doctrinal authority. Others exemplified other dilemmas caused by the overlap between religious, legal and ethical

imperatives by knowledgeable reference to abortion, or conscientious objection to military service. Equally, high scoring candidates were those able to make effective use of AO4 (different kinds of knowledge and its limitations) in both assembling their material and then discussing it.

Generally candidates, even weaker ones, did identify the conundrum, in that clearly either the Roman Catholic community or the homosexual community would have to be disappointed.

Numbers of candidates took the Roman Catholic position as read and did not attempt to explain the authority it drew from the Bible. Very good candidates quoted Biblical statements from elsewhere to demonstrate that the Roman Catholic position was not necessarily as authentically Biblically-based as might have been assumed.

Good candidates also explored the wider legal position whereby homosexuals have been given ever-increasing recognition in the community which only culminated with the Equality Act. They also quoted research from Britain and abroad in to the experience and likely future behaviour of children brought up by homosexual couples.

In general this question was handled with enormous sensitivity, with just the occasional candidate expressing deviant views. These latter were never the declared Roman Catholics, some of whom took the opportunity to argue that they felt that the Church should modernise its position.

2968: Culture, Science and Society: Making Connections

General Comments

This January saw a slightly larger entry for this unit but no diminution in the overall standard of work presented. The concept of 'synoptic' is a well-founded one now in most Centres and candidates are seemingly coming to terms with what is required in this examination.

Examiners are seeing fewer examples of essays which neatly divide into three domain areas and, in fact on many occasions, struggle to provide adequate coverage and discussion or forge the weakest of links. In fact, it is quite exciting for examiners to at last see candidates observing and exploring more subtle connections between facts and figures and spending useful time in the examination debating and questioning the varying value of links which can be made.

Stimulus material is not intended to be included for use in the manner of a comprehension. It is there to feed, trigger, excite, and even to annoy the candidate in to a suitable response. By the same rule it is not there to provoke an attack. The essence of General Studies has always been to look at the topic in a reasonable and balanced way then, by all means, promote one's own viewpoint or conclusion (that is assuming that this is logical, fathomable and workable). On this occasion, Professor Len Doyal's comments on euthanasia served as ample fodder for interesting responses but there must be some control exercised in the way in which candidates support or refute his point of view. His ideas are only part of the scenario, the most important element being the candidates' own reasoned and balanced ideas.

Examiners expect to see essays of high quality at this level – not just in content but also construction. For that reason, candidates are reminded to set out their arguments in a logical progression, using appropriate and accurate language and layout. A simply descriptive script is not valued at this level. There needs to be engagement, enquiry, a balanced approach and the exploration of the tenable and untenable before reaching a conclusion or offering a future prediction or projection.

Examiners observed several levels of writing in this session as the topics of euthanasia and Britishness stirred up feeling and passion amongst the candidature. There were extremes to be seen: powerful and patriotic pieces celebrating the wonders of our country; fearful and foreboding texts on the inherent dangers of euthanasia. This all lead to an interesting session with a wide range of scripts and styles on view for examiners.

Attendance at INSET courses has been low this year but one of the perennial messages sent out seems to be reaching Centres. Good planning results in good marks (whether the plan is discrete or not). It is possible to include one paragraph for each domain though it has been more successful to write more closely about the concept being proposed and then referring to one or more domains in the process. This makes for more cogent and firm synoptic links being formed which read well and can be clearly be identified in the body of the script. Equally at INSET, the idea of exploring the unpopular is a constant inclusion.

Euthanasia provides an ideal topic for this as there is so many extremes that can be explored for better or worse. It is the candidate's ability to act as arbiter and judge over these points that singles out the highest quality answers which turn the ordinary in to the extraordinary.

Time management was not really a key issue in this session. Examiners observed that shorter essays where fewer marks were scored were the result of a lack of commitment and involvement rather than an inability to construct and answer. English and syntax were of a good standard overall and examiners reported a large number of entertaining and informed answers to two quite different questions.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 The question was concerned with the proposal to make euthanasia legal in the UK. Quite predictably, it invited a wide range of responses from the acutely emotional to the casually detached. Examiners were impressed by the level of engagement which was offered by some candidates, at times introducing quite pertinent and moving personal anecdotes which were totally appropriate and served well as either indicators or illustrators,

In the Cultural Domain, examiners were looking for some link to beliefs and values and the dependence which these have on a person's response to the topic. Equally, when this was linked to a person's ethnicity or cultural background it quickly gave the points made more stability and credibility. A common inclusion was the difficulties faced by doctors and other medical staff who are involved in life and death decisions but who themselves have convictions.

This varies from country to country, culture to culture. All of these points were common statements though at times presented blandly without any support or extension. One of the simpler concepts was rarely exploited: namely that in the Western world many men and women live in democracies where they have a choice and the law in this country was preventing them from exercising this. In essence this is the classic case of assessment objective 4 making an impact by offering two quite different and drastic outcomes. In this case the candidate makes a reasoned judgement or case.

In the Scientific Domain the key point raised was that of the 'miracle cure' scenario (that is, the day after 'painless' death). Here was an opportunity for cross domain examination of issues which could have been so easily exploited. There were many cases where candidates should have exercised some restraint and not attempted to take the reader on an emotional roller coaster to propose either for or against euthanasia.

Reference to the laws of Nature, the sanctity of the human soul and spirit and the concept of destiny provided a small number of candidates with the best of answers discretely yet effectively linking cultural, scientific, and social domains in a single paragraph – quite outstanding.

The Social Domain provide the safest ground for candidates to improvise on matters such as stress, personal pain, the legality issues, the positive effects on the National Health Service, and the overall tensions of everything connected with this minefield topic. Yet there were some clever, intricate constructions which linked the doctor to the patient and family, and then the courts to provide a veritable 'soap opera' scenario which, sometimes unwittingly, linked all three domains in a quite enlightened way.

The source was necessarily provocative and intent on soliciting a response from candidates. Examiners did not expect to see line by line criticism of the script in the manner of a comprehension passage. Using the source to 'inform your answer' was suggesting that the ideas of Doyal may be used to prod and poke at the subject and even illustrate the opposite point of view in some cases. Essentially the question was

not about the source. Having said this, most answers seen were reasonable, compassionate, thoughtful and deliberated, as candidates displayed humanity and sensitivity to a topic of great controversy.

- 2 The question comprised a table of information taken from a YouGov poll on the concept of Britishness. Success was measured on the ability to choose one specific item from each domain for discussion and relation to the idea of Britishness. In fact, there was no compulsion to choose one of the ideas from the table and therefore some candidates argued quite well for their one choice. In fact there were so many possibilities of uniquely British phenomena that one would be literally spoiled for choice. It was therefore quite surprising the number that chose things that could have belonged to any country rather than our own and attempted to justify its or their position.

It was important to grasp the concept of 'unique' – the only one of a type. The question was looking at British character, style, industry, and inventiveness. Answers referring to our sense of humour and 'stiff upper lip' are valid if they could be supported by adequate exemplars and proposed with a sustained argument in time and space.

Where candidates did use the source for their answers it was remarkable how little they did in fact know about the list or how naïve their views and knowledge actually were. The fact that the BBC is seen as the epitome of neutrality may be so but would have developed in to an excellent answer if mention were made of controversy surrounding the BBC's apparent political partiality and the problems this has brought to them. Indeed, if something like Pubs was 16th in the chart then why so? Traditional English Pubs might be near the top of any visitor's idea of typically British but could it be the 'theme pub' or commercialisation that has caused the pub to plummet! Here would have been the ground to score highly by providing a wider analysis and offering different views and knowledge on the subject. Similarly, why is the Church of England next to bottom? Surely this would be regarded as typically British?

Quite a common choice was the Monarchy but is this typically British? There are others throughout the world. Typically good answers tried to point out why the British Monarchy was different to everywhere else and made cultural and social connections in doing so which in turn gained good marks for the answer. The better answers seen were those that tackled the abstract like stoicism, tolerance, sense of fair play and justice. These ideas were generally lavished with appropriate examples which made the point clearly and firmly. The weakest responses were barely more than descriptive of the chosen idea or item and, in many case, the fact were inaccurate or spurious in some way.

Again, the question mentions using the source 'and your own ideas.' Judging by some of the answers seen one begs the question did the candidate read the question carefully enough particularly if the response offered extends no further than the source rubric.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE General Studies (3831/7831)
January 2008 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
2961	Raw	100	77	70	63	56	49	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2962	Raw	100	66	59	53	47	41	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2964	Raw	100	66	58	51	44	37	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2965	Raw	100	67	59	51	43	36	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2966	Raw	100	63	56	50	44	38	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2968	Raw	100	66	59	53	47	41	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
3831	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7831	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3831	8.3	23.6	46.7	70.0	86.4	100	3723
7831	11.4	29.2	53.2	79.2	94.2	100	891

4614 candidates aggregated this series.

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

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