

# **General Studies**

Advanced GCE A2 H479

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H079

## **Report on the Units**

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**June 2009**

**HX79/MS/R/09**

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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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**Advanced Subsidiary GCE General Studies (H079)**

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## **Chief Examiner's Report**

This was the first summer sitting for this new specification. Two units F731 (Social and Cultural Domains) and F732 (Science Domain) were available and together they constituted the AS award.

Two teams of examiners marked these papers and in their reports made the following points.

- Clearly the majority of the candidature were well prepared and approached the tasks with informed energy and enthusiasm.
- It was apparent that centres had used the new specification to good effect and had familiarised their candidates with the changed structure of the two examination papers.
- Though the time allowances for each paper were very different it was evident that this was not a problem for the candidates.
- For some candidates, it appeared that this was the first time they had been asked to produce pieces of extended writing. This proved a challenge for some and centres are recommended to ensure that their candidates do have experience of writing at length. Though the number of words used in an answer is no guide to quality, some weaker candidates wrote as little as six lines in developing their Section B responses. Better candidates formed pieces of extended writing that including an introduction, several developed paragraphs and a conclusion. In producing these they answered all parts of the question.
- A clear concern was candidates' apparent lack of understanding, experience or appreciation of those parts of Unit 731 concerned with 'high culture'. Their weakness appears to focus on their understanding of the creative process. Many candidates appear to have little experience of the arts beyond Banksy and rock music.
- Poor handwriting remains a matter of concern with some scripts. The use of word processing may mean that the examination paper is the first occasion that some candidates have hand-written at length for some time. Though examiners make every effort to read the scripts of candidates there are times when the meaning of a sentence could be at risk.

In conclusion the examining team would wish to congratulate centres on a promising start to this new specification. At their best the scripts of many candidates were a delight to read.

## **F731 The Cultural and Social Domains**

### **General Comments**

The examination was the first major sitting of the new specification with a large entry of candidates from a variety of Centres across the country. Two hours seemed to give ample time to produce a full response to the questions and, as a result, examiners were pleased to be able to award a full range of marks. A pattern emerged similar to that in previous years, in that candidates' knowledge of the social domain exceeds that of the cultural domain. Whether this is because the social domain encompasses so many daily life skills and experiences remains to be seen; however, examiners noted some weaknesses in responses to questions relating to the arts, such as questions 1 and 4.

Short answer questions offer a sure way to begin to gather marks if the ideas introduced are exemplified and supported. For example, if one point is asked for and three marks are available there are clearly two marks to gain for the development of the material. It was pleasing to see that many candidates had been fully prepared for this type of question and therefore scored well in Sections A and C.

In the case of essay writing it is pleasing to note that many candidates are using a standard format in order to cover the rubric of the question. This consists of three sections:

- an introduction explaining task and demands of the question
- coverage of the main points and issues
- a conclusion consisting of a summary, preference or projection.

When this approach is adopted it almost certainly leads to some success, as the strategy ensures that the question is dealt with fairly and fully. However, fine adjustments such as balance in the material, the inclusion of examples and the questioning of facts will further enhance and engage the reader.

Whilst examiners are happy to applaud judicious time management, successful completion of the examination also involves good quality of communication. This includes the selection and employment of appropriate terms and vocabulary that will serve to refine and clarify a subject. Question 1 provided a good opportunity to employ specialist terms in respect of the techniques of artists, though there are several other clear opportunities to impress in different areas of the paper.

The overall impression of the performance of candidates was good and is a clear confirmation of the improvements in organisation and quality of General Studies courses in OCR Centres.

## **Comments on individual questions**

### **Section A**

- 1 Many candidates responded positively to the four images, though there was a common tendency to write too much on each one in answer to part (a). A purely descriptive answer was not required – examiners were looking for details about the creative process which may have included materials and equipment, working conditions, sense of audience and the composition of the subject matter. The word ‘silhouette’ was commonly misspelt when responding to the photograph and in the case of the musical score some candidates interpreted the image on the page as a photograph rather than a representation of the process of composition. Part (b) was universally well-answered, with a perceptive understanding of the style secrets; however, part (c) produced mixed responses. Some failed to understand the fundamental rubric of the question, namely to apply one of the ‘secrets’ to an artist that they knew. Leonardo and Picasso were common choices as were the modern fashion designers. Part (d) was well answered with many scoring full marks on varying external influences such as economic change, war, and politics.

### **Section B**

- 2 This was a popular question, and the word ‘extent, gave candidates the opportunity to look at the concepts of knowledge and power in different ways and from varying perspectives. An open-ended question such as this allows candidates to gain valuable marks under assessment objective three (different kinds of knowledge) by introducing personal experience and by looking more deeply into the limitations that knowledge presents. Good candidates grasped the philosophical undertones to the question and wrote freely utilising good examples. These candidates were aware of different kinds of knowledge. In the middle range of ability, candidates wrote about politics, war, and education but did not really connect power and knowledge with any quality analysis. Weaker candidates tended to refer only to education and wrote superficially without examples or development of ideas.
- 3 The question made the distinction between magazines and periodicals; the idea was to avoid reference to newspapers. Successful candidates needed to look at how these publications used to look in the past, thereby offering a comparison. Equally, it was important to refer to examples of magazines or periodicals in order to present a solid case for consideration. Though plenty of ways of change were highlighted, in most essays there was a marked difficulty in examining and exposing the process of change. When newspapers were referred to, examiners gave some credit if the process of change overlapped in some way; long, descriptive passages were self penalising.
- 4 This question proved to be unpopular - somewhat surprisingly, given the importance that audio and visual media have in the lives of young people. It was perhaps the words ‘art form’ that deterred some candidates from choosing this question; examiners were pleased to see examples of new music (or pop albums), television programmes and series, films, and buildings as well as paintings and sculptures. There were so many difficulties that could have been cited: for example cost, demand, location, competition, the public’s view, and time taken. However, many of the difficulties seemed to focus on human, psychological and emotional facets of the process of creation and the strain under which an artist is put to be truly original.

### **Section C**

- 5 Candidates appeared to have many opinions on transport, based on what they had learned or through personal experience. Part (a) was well illustrated with many adverse comments on the poor reliability of the local bus services, notably in rural areas. However, some candidates failed to notice the words 'in Europe' and made reference to a more global or universal problem. Part (b) was looking for two key points on why light rail is so popular and these seemed to be easily found. Similarly, in part (c) most candidates could identify how cities are being regenerated. However, the problem arose in supporting these points with extension of the idea or an example. This is an established style of questioning in General Studies and Centres are encouraged to practise this technique in preparing for the examination. Finally, in part (d) 15 marks were gained if the two chosen alternatives were simply illustrated. Walking and cycling were the popular alternatives, though there was strong support for buses and other public transport that would encourage a greener approach to travelling. Overall, examiners were very pleased and encouraged by the enthusiasm shown by candidates in answering this question, though some responses tended to be rather longer than needed.

### **Section D**

- 6 This was not a popular option but those who chose it fared well. Following a simple 'for' and 'against' format, candidates needed to present arguments about referenda taking place and not simply give a list of points. There was a lack of examples in some responses: for example, a statement that referenda provide a 'yes' or 'no' answer would have been strengthened by mention of the UK's historic entry into the Common Market or the Republic of Ireland's recent rejection of the EU constitution. However, this would rely on some prior knowledge being learned before the examination or the use of information from other subject areas (like History or Politics), in the true spirit of General Studies.
- 7 The Public Sector is an integral part of the specification content and this question was looking for a straightforward 'advantages and disadvantages' response. Some able candidates were able to cite examples from the rail industry, B.T., and utility companies. At the other end of the spectrum, some candidates identified education as an industry.
- 8 This very popular question provided a wide range of responses, from the acutely perceptive to the positively banal. The essay involved the selection of two groups and the discussion of practical ways to relieve their plight and improve their position. The chosen groups needed to be put into perspective, followed by identification of initiatives and ideas such as financial intervention, more tolerance from others, support of voluntary agencies, and positive reports from the media. On the whole, candidates tended to focus on negative views of each group and their 'struggle', rather than to celebrate the fact that it might be possible to alleviate their exclusion through a more positive slant on their position and activities or indeed what they have to offer to society. The most common groups were teenagers, homosexuals, the elderly, the disabled, and immigrants.

## F732 The Scientific Domain

### General Comments

This was the first summer sitting of this new paper. Candidates and examiners appeared to have been satisfied with the experience of writing and marking scripts. Indeed a number of examiners expressed their pleasure with the questions that had been set and the quality, engagement and energy of candidates' responses.

A number of general features were reported by examiners.

- Candidates responded well to the new style of question where they were expected to use scientific and mathematical skills to analyse situations. Centres are encouraged to develop their teaching using this style.
- The vast majority of the candidates approached the examination with energy and interest. They appeared to have been well prepared for the paper.
- The paper carries dedicated marks for AO4 (Communication). In Section A there are six of the thirty marks available allocated to AO4. Candidates can enhance their total score through clear communication, sound spelling and the accurate use of grammar. The key point is that they communicate the finer points of their arguments.
- There was a pleasing improvement in the level of mathematical ability of many candidates. Centres may wish to encourage students in this respect by offering them exercises where the use of mathematical skills is the key, rather than the recall of formulae.
- Though the time available for this examination was only sixty minutes, examiners reported that in the main candidates made very good use of this period. Clearly the extended writing in Section B did not match the rounded essays of A2 but it provided a step in that direction.

### Section A

1. This question asked candidates to consider arguments involving the location of two ice cream sellers on a beach. The model was in fact a simplification of the forces in action in a competitive and a planned situation. In (a) the candidates had to report from the competitive position of the two sellers. They did this with skill. In (b) the focus was on the views of customers when the ice cream sellers were at the quarter points of the beach. The majority were able to suggest reasons for customers preferring this location. A minority of candidates answered from the point of view of the sellers and some wrote that the absence of competition saved the customers embarrassment.

For part (c), candidates had to generalise the ice cream seller model to the location of shops. This proved challenging for many candidates. Some thought that shops were to be located on the beach. A minority were able to link the locations of shops they knew to the patterns suggested in the model. Centres may wish to consider giving their candidates more experience of abstract models and of ways in which these can be generalised to everyday situations.

A key point here was the way in which shops selling similar goods tend to agglomerate. High Streets illustrate this, with clothing and shoe shops grouped. These shops are catering for the comparison shopper. In contrast convenience shoppers tend to look for nearby provision and even large supermarkets tend to select sites away from the competition.

A number of candidates appeared to have little idea how competition would work. It was indicated that the two ice-cream sellers were in competition yet some candidates wrote of the sharing of customers and stock. It would be worthwhile centres familiarising



candidates with some of the forces acting in conditions of competition. These ideas of competition and contagion clearly have application in many scientific spheres beyond the economy.

2. This question focused on the mathematical part of the specification. It was in two parts, the first dealing a number square and the second with Mersenne numbers. As in question 1, the focus was for candidates to use the skills they had in an unfamiliar situation. This question based upon mathematical skill revealed that some candidates had sound skills and the ability to use them. Other candidates did less well because they were unable to use the skills required by the question. As a result the marks tended to be polarised – either high or low scores.

Question 2(a) was answered well by the majority of candidates. They noted that rows, columns and diagonals added to fifteen. Other patterns were recognised and rewarded.

In question 2(b) candidates had to use a formula that involved powers. Some appeared to have forgotten this basic mathematics. Examiners operated an 'error carried forward' method of marking to allow such candidates to score marks after they had made a basic error. For example, instead of 2 to the power n they calculated  $2n$ . This gave them answers of 5, 7, 9 and 11 and made later parts of the question more difficult.

In 2(b) (ii) and (iii) a number of candidates did not clearly explain their finding. In both cases there were AO4 (communication) marks set aside and these were lost if the explanation was not clear.

In 2(b) (iii) candidates were give a brief definition of a prime number. They were then asked to demonstrate that two numbers were not primes. Examiners suggest that many candidates did not need the definition and in fact recalled it from their earlier studies.

## **Section B**

3. This was the most popular question in this section of the paper and there were many good answers. Candidates were asked to consider the decision to make the donation of organs compulsory. They were invited to develop two arguments for and two against this plan. Most candidates were able to offer the four arguments required. The question differentiated the candidates by the quality and development of these arguments.

The core of this question was the suggestion that donation be made compulsory. The arguments that candidates used to indicate advantages and disadvantages were therefore valid if they referred to this suggestion. One regular misunderstanding was that the compulsion might be exercised on live donors. This, some candidates suggested, was unfair, particularly if it involved a vital organ such as a heart. For example a small number of candidates asked what would happen if your kidney was removed compulsorily and then your second one failed.

It was pleasing to read candidates describing with sensitivity the emotions of the bereaved if faced with the compulsory donation of organs. Other candidates developed in some detail religious reservations based upon beliefs that the after life required a wholeness of the body.

4. This question asked candidates to cite a forecast made by scientists that had proved helpfully accurate and one forecast that had been less accurate. They were then asked to suggest reasons for the difference in accuracy of the two forecasts. It was anticipated that candidates would select as being accurate and helpful forecasts such as that for the daily weather. The less accurate forecast was expected to be drawn from such areas as the timing of earthquakes, volcanoes and economic change. Many candidates followed this

pattern and were able to suggest reasons for the differences. These included lack of data, complexity of the system, and time scale.

Less successful were candidates who selected forecasts of climate change. This was a popular choice in both categories. At times it looked as if these were pre-prepared essays on global warming that the candidate was attempting to fine tune to the question. Such a strategy is not recommended. However candidates found it more difficult to suggest reasons for the helpful accuracy or inaccuracy of scientific predictions. Part of their problem arose because as yet the identified changes attributed to global warming are provisional and the causes, as yet, not proven.

It was noted that some candidates were topical in citing bird and swine influenza. The former was seen as a failed prediction but forecasts for the latter were still uncertain at the time that the paper was taken.

5. In this question candidates had to explore the concept of 'hindsight' as it might apply to the solution of environmental problems. They were expected to use this everyday concept within the familiar territory of problem solving. Examiners expected that the candidates would select an environmental problem, explain how the solutions chosen had proved unsatisfactory and then, using hindsight, suggest an alternative. Potential problems included residential estates and out of town shopping areas that, because of their location, had created large amounts of traffic congestion and where, with hindsight, it would have been more effective to bring the provision away from busy ring and main roads.

It was interesting to note that some candidates did not recognise that managed and planned solutions are a feature of the way society deals with the problems it faces. The general impression is that 'government' deals with everything. The notion of managed solutions is a concept worth promoting in future.

Though this question was not selected by a large number of candidates those answering it did so with energy and creativity.

## **Conclusions**

1. It is recommended that centres encourage candidates to write in a clear way that can readily be understood by examiners. Whilst every attempt is made to read each word of a script, there is some risk that examiners may not gain full understanding if the text is very difficult to decipher.
2. Centres should encourage candidates to include examples. These are particularly effective in this Science Domain paper, where they can develop an answer and increase the clarity of a point or argument. Personal examples are to be encouraged when they link to the point being made. They afford access to AO3. However they should be avoided if they are anecdotal and distant from the precise context under discussion.
3. It is suggested that centres give candidates more experience of selecting a question from a choice of three. Some questions have been carefully designed to indicate a structure to the candidates. They have a pathway with a series of tasks specified. They engage with a particular content. Others are more open-ended, allowing the candidates greater freedom to select case studies and the focus of the content areas. Questions 3 and 5 are examples of these two types. If a candidate selects the first type then they should recognise that they must attempt all the parts of the question. Only parts with the word 'briefly' added can be given lower status. In the second type the candidate must be able to provide their own coherent structure and ready to explore a range of aspects suggested by the question. It was clear that some centres took this approach. Either approach is satisfactory but it is a decision that should be recognised.

*Report on the Units taken in June 2009*

4. Centres are reminded that candidates may use a calculator in this examination. In view of the mathematical sections of the specification it is recommended that candidates take a calculator with them to this examination. The use of a calculator is likely to be a feature of future examinations in the Science Domain.

Finally examiners wish to congratulate centres and students for the quality of the work they produced under tight examination conditions. Much was pleasing to read and a credit to staff and students.

# Grade Thresholds

Advanced Subsidiary GCE General Studies (H079)  
June 2009 Examination Series

## Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
F731	Raw	120	93	84	75	66	58	0
	UMS	140	112	98	84	70	56	0
F732	Raw	60	50	44	39	34	29	0
	UMS	60	48	42	36	30	24	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
H079	200	160	140	120	100	80	0

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

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
H079	8.3	20.7	38.5	57.9	75.2	100	14724

## 14724 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:  
[http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums\\_results.html](http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html)

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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