

General Studies

Advanced GCE A2 H479

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H079

Report on the Units

January 2010

HX79/MS/R/10J

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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 specification 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

This was the first occasion on which all four units were available for the General Studies specification that began in September 2008. The detailed reports that follow have been compiled by the Principal Examiners for each paper. They are based on the comments of Team Leaders and Assistant Examiners who have read, in detail, the scripts written by candidates. As a result these reports represent the best feedback for centres as they develop their experience of this new specification. This applies particularly at AS to Unit 731 The Cultural and Social Domain and at A2 to Unit 733 Domain Exploration: Applying Synoptic Skills. In these units there has been considerable change from the previous specification.

A key feature of the new General Studies specification is an increased emphasis on inviting candidates to use their 'Thinking and Analytical Skills' within a context provided by the question. These skills are listed in Teaching Module 4 of the specification. Centres are encouraged to include experience of the use of these skills in their preparation of candidates. This will serve the candidates well in their General Studies examinations as well as in other studies.

The main common features arising from the individual unit reports are:

- commendation from the AS examiners on the way in which centres have familiarised candidates with the structure and demands of the two AS papers
- advice in all reports for candidates to take the crucial step, when writing a very good answer, to structure their extended writing in a coherent and convincing way
- a weakness, noted at AS and A2, in the level of information that the candidates had about matters related to the Cultural Domain. Reading the specification for General Studies shows the Cultural Domain to include Beliefs, values and moral reasoning; Media and communication; Creativity and innovation at AS. At A2 this area includes Religious belief and experience, Alternatives to religion, Moral activities of the media and the influence of public opinion, the salient features of western, popular and high culture and the culture of minority groups
- the variation between centres in candidates' awareness of the nature of the examination. E.g. at a simple level the holding of a calculator for Unit 732. The slogan 'Preparation pays' was recommended by all Principal Examiners.

A final and pleasing feature of all the reports is the impression that Centres had worked hard to prepare their candidates for the examination. Some of the essays were delightful to read and a credit to candidates and their teachers.

F731 The Cultural and Social Domains

General Comments

It is pleasing to see the consistency in performance that is emerging as this examination enters its second year. Definite improvements are noted as each session passes: there are fewer spoiled papers either through rubric infringements or immaturity on the part of the candidate; most students manage to complete the paper in the time allowed and there is definite sense of empathy and engagement with the questions. At the same time, it is important to emphasise the importance of reading the wording carefully to avoid misunderstandings and omissions and, more significantly, to digest the allocation of marks for each question and, as a result, allocate time accordingly.

Answers in Sections A and C require well-constructed sentences with the required fact plus some support and/or example to access full marks. This is sometimes hampered by candidates' inability to make themselves understood and examiners are sometimes stretched to the limits of their discretion in order to decipher or allow a response. Centres are reminded of the need for examination practice, especially in the presentation and structure of answers. This is a crucial step to attaining higher marks in what is an examination that tests the student's ability to think out and present a convincing and cogent response.

Overall, short questions were generally answered well and there were relatively few rubric infringements. However, it goes without saying that there is a lot to do in two hours and therefore the careful allocation of time across the four sections is crucial. The quality of written communication continues to remain only satisfactory. Examiners have reported the extremes of the almost unintelligible to pure eloquence. The main features to highlight are frequent misspellings of common words or words featured in the questions, weak punctuation and sentence structure and a sometimes total lack of paragraphing.

General Studies crosses all subject boundaries and is the opportunity for candidates to employ the considerable experience gained from their years in formal education. Examiners noted serious weaknesses and inaccuracies in historical knowledge, most glaringly evident in question 4 on artistic change, where it affected even candidates who had some enthusiasm for a particular painter or musician. The development of historical perspective, the consideration of different views held at different periods, and the use of evidence to support arguments, all relate closely to skills examined by the General Studies paper, but they need facts to chew on. For whatever cultural or political reasons, many students appear to live in an eternal present in which Eminem is as close in time as Elvis Presley and Mozart is a contemporary of both.

Despite concerns regarding the length of the paper, a large number of students appear to have allocated equal time to all four questions and finished the whole paper. However, it does appear that the demands of the shorter questions - where students may find it easier to pick up marks - may be inducing some to apply less mental focus to the weightier essay questions, which resulted in fewer candidates reaching the higher mark levels in Sections B and D.

Section A: The Cultural Domain (Short answer questions)

1a) Lack of precision in explaining terms and failure to engage with both parts was evident. The words 'unmediated', 'dynamic' and 'incoherent' proved to be challenging for some candidates and this indicated a lack of preparation or experience for this type of question. Clearly, all parts of the phrase need to be discussed without using the words given in order to be able to qualify for maximum marks.

b) This question was answered very well and showed that candidates were fully aware of the breadth of influence that blogs have in everyday life. It seemed straightforward for most to supply two advantages and disadvantages and support these with informed comment.

c) This question was generally well-answered but some candidates failed to demonstrate an understanding of the term “media conglomerates”. The better answers linked the move in this direction to globalisation and made reference to Rupert Murdoch, Fox, and the BBC. Cynicism appeared to be all-prevailing: absolutely nothing in the press or television can be trusted! Some weaker candidates referred only to blogs, tending to turn the argument round by empathising with the honesty of blogs and thereby showing up the dishonesty of other media forms. Assertions were made about the government’s control of press and broadcasting but this was refreshingly balanced by the precision used by candidates in illustrating their views with examples of target audience, political bias, and the concentration of power in the hands of a few Press Barons.

Section B: The Cultural Domain (Essay questions)

Question 2

This question asked candidate to outline one positive and one negative outcome of people trusting their instincts in everyday life. This proved to be a challenging question. A few rose to it by offering a valid definition, often by using a comparison with animals, and some wrote about particular instincts arising from, for instance, the sexual urge or natural fear and the need for self-preservation. However, a large group floundered and submerged themselves in suppositions and imaginary events that were not likely as supporting examples. There were some complex and thoughtful discussions of positives and negatives from the good candidates, but the weak ones frequently confused learned behaviour with natural instincts and wrote about incidents encountered whilst driving or decisions made about lottery tickets, bets on horses or whether to cross the road.

Many candidates struggled to define ‘instinct’ and produced content that was irrelevant, largely about chance or learned experience. Examples were rather thin, being invented tales of people who followed premonition-style feelings and were saved from calamity which were then inverted and reproduced as evidence of negative impacts.

Higher ability candidates discussed the idea of instincts; what they are and the purpose. In these answers, positive and negative outcomes were clearly identified. Lower achieving candidates were sometimes unsure of what instincts were and sometimes confused them with other issues such as chance. Daily use of the phrase “my instinct” probably beguiled some into an unwise choice. The impression is that students thought this question looked less demanding of factual underpinning than the others.

Question 3

This question asked candidates to outline and discuss why regional and local newspapers should continue to be published in an age where the press is dominated by a small number of national newspapers.

Almost as popular as question 2 but generally eliciting much better, more confident responses, the question really seemed to provide candidates with an opportunity to keep thinking throughout the piece, adding further reasons and developing arguments as they wrote. Several candidates, however, marred their answers by trying to also argue that local and regional newspapers had very little value. While balanced thought is usually to be rewarded, this was not answering the question. Many candidates were able to give a number of reasons of why local newspapers should be kept and it was encouraging that the examples of candidates’ own local or regional newspapers served as support and example material. Some candidates contrasted the response

by discussing Nationals and were able to consider advantages and disadvantages for both, though a lack of familiarity with national newspapers led to no reference or only limited reference to “dominated by a small number of national papers”. There was a tendency to describe the content and almost all named their local paper and seemed to be keen supporters.

Some outstanding examples integrated concrete references to local events (a fire, a school sporting event, a local hero) and, in some cases, the local press had been instrumental in a resurgence of community spirit during the severe weather of January 2010. Some students were led astray by the misapprehension that **all** local newspapers are free sheets. A few of the good answers added a consideration of the economic developments threatening the local and regional newspapers and the detrimental effect of a complete surrender to national news.

Question 4

This question focused on how Art is constantly changing and asked candidates to choose one art form and use two examples to illustrate the way in which this art form has changed and reasons why.

In many answers, candidates displayed good use of knowledge from other areas of study. For example Stanislavski and Brecht were used to good effect in essays on changes in Drama. However, the commonly used formula was to write very general remarks on art forms or about changes in the perception or value of art forms rather than the art form itself. Any knowledge of dates and chronological sequence was very weak and some very broad generalisations were made about “classical” or “traditional music”. Loose phrasing - 'thousands of years ago' referring to the Renaissance, and 'hundreds of years ago' when writing about features of the early twentieth century - was very common.

Few answers on music detailed any changes in style, form or instrumentation. More commonly, Examiners observed vague references to changes in what society thought acceptable or aspects of marketing and celebrity culture. When attempting to write about 'change' a number made no reference to the preceding situation, so exactly what **had** changed was not clear. Many omitted entirely any possible reasons for change. However, those candidates who did grasp the question and had evidence and knowledge at their disposal gave some of the best answers of the whole paper in response to this question. Some responses showed that the candidates had knowledge of the art form, although their responses tended to be descriptive rather than attempting to analyse the differences over time.

Section C: The Social Domain (Short answer questions)

5a) This question worked well, with candidates looking at the pictures carefully and drawing valid conclusions about wealth, atmosphere, living conditions and so on. A few treated it as an exercise in the appreciation of photographic techniques but most appreciated the fact that the environment was the crucial issue. Clearly thought out and communicated environmental differences were identified by the more able, who found plenty of material in the pictures. Less able candidates ignored the phrase “between these environments” and tended to focus on photographic differences.

b) There was a tendency for candidates to focus on the word ‘misleading’ but then make non-environmental comments. Some answers confidently made relevant points, such as the inevitable crime or poverty found in cities. Higher marks were awarded as a result of making points that emerged from the sources rather than simply commenting on them at face value.

c) Few candidates achieved maximum marks on this question as there seemed to be some uncertainty over the term 'lifestyle'. The majority wrote answers along the lines of 'if you live in a rural area there will be nothing to do' or 'if you live in a poor area you will be likely to turn to crime' without any further exemplification or development. The best responses appeared when

candidates engaged with the question from their own personal experience and highlighted features that they considered to be important and true to life.

d) A number took this to mean 'give a list of reasons why people leave home' and produced exactly that: a list. There was a distinct divide between those candidates who simply listed reasons for leaving and those who unpacked the phrase 'home is where the heart is'. Successful candidates were those who tackled each aspect. Some thoughtful and 'heartfelt' examples were observed, with virtually all offering a wide range of reasons why people leave home and many bringing in their own personal experience. The discussion of reasons for not returning brought in a number of wider issues such as natural disasters, wars, and political instability.

Section D: The Social Domain (Essay questions)

Question 6

This question asked candidates to outline two of the roles performed by local government and for each identify a reason why local government may be criticised as to the way it performs this role. It also asked candidates to suggest a solution to the problems in each case.

This was not a popular question and there appeared to be a lack of knowledge of the subject. Candidates who did have some understanding of the role of local government usually chose road maintenance (not surprisingly in view of the poor January weather conditions) and refuse collection as their areas of concern.

Solutions tended to focus on the spending of more money or using many more resources in order to alleviate problems. A few also understood that finances diverted to the service in question would result in higher taxation or a reduction of funding elsewhere. Many solutions concerned additional funding. More time was spent identifying the criticisms rather than discussing how improvements could be implemented. Invariably, candidates' ideas were impractical and uneconomical, with the majority of answers lacking concrete details and information in support of proposed solutions.

Question 7

This question asked candidates to choose one of the primary emergency services (police, fire or ambulance), to examine two public criticisms of the service chosen and to give solutions to each of the problems identified.

There were some well informed and supported criticisms of both police and ambulance services, often with personal examples, though the fire service was rarely cited. A few offered imaginative and plausible solutions to public criticisms but, again, the popular answer offered was to 'have more police' or 'buy more ambulances'. The main threat concerning students appeared to be gang violence, against which they wanted the police to be tough, but students were also – in a number of relatively fluent arguments - incensed by instances where the police picked on young people wearing hoods.

Many solutions were not thought through logically, such as having 'a police station in every village' or 'a bobby on the beat on every street.' 'Special ambulance lanes' added to every road would be a physical impossibility and some candidates scored poorly due to their answers and suggestions being unfounded, trivial and sometimes frivolous. One or two saw this question as an opportunity to offload a personal grudge against the police and spent most of the essay describing an incident in which they felt they had been victimised. It was, however, refreshing to read some essays that attempted to offer some defence against the criticisms, and that showed some appreciation of the difficulties and constraints under which these services operate. Many solutions related to lack of funding and the reduction of excessive paperwork with reference to

the police force – this proved to be an over-riding reason as to why the service could not operate efficiently. Whichever service was chosen, there were complaints about the time taken to reach an incident, though as a contrast, some candidates appeared to have family members or friends who work in one of these services and their responses were refreshingly more understanding and sympathetic.

Question 8

This question was based on controversy, tension and discord in sport and how such problems can occur. It also required candidates to suggest ways in which these controversies may be dealt with by the authorities governing the sports.

There was clearly a gender split here. Many boys were well informed about controversies in football such as 'diving', handball and controversial penalty decisions. A number brought in the recent cheating issue in Rugby Union. The other common choice was drug taking in Athletics. In most essays, the second choice sport was almost always handled less effectively than the first but this might have been a result of running out of time. Solutions for the football and rugby incidents were almost always centred on technology and video refereeing. Suggestions for the tackling of illegal use of drugs usually pointed to more tests, specialists and counsellors. In a few cases, candidates were able to see beyond these ideas and tried to examine the implications of removing some of the conflict and therefore the excitement of the sport in question. This might include slowing down the game or modifying the rules.

It was pleasing to read so many essays where many candidates had an opportunity to discuss something about which they were informed and passionate. Many answers were detailed, although some candidates gave very long descriptions of incidents without giving themselves any opportunity to analyse the lessons to be learned. Common examples were "Bloodgate" (rugby union), doping and subsequent bans (Dwayne Chambers - athletics), and Thierry Henry's goal against Ireland in the World Cup play-off game (football). It was unfortunate, however, that some essays were over-concerned with the behaviour and attitudes of rival fans rather the tensions within the sport itself.

F732 The Scientific Domain

This was the third sitting of this paper, which followed the format of its two predecessors in having two sections A and B. In Section A, worth fifty percent of the marks, there were two compulsory questions concerned with science and mathematics. In Section B, again worth fifty percent of the marks, there were three questions of which the candidates had to select one.

The great majority of Examiners reported that the paper was of an appropriate level and that in general candidates had responded well to the challenges set. It is pleasing to note that a number of candidates scored in excess of 50 marks (over 80%) and several scored a maximum 60. In addition, nearly all candidates answered all of the various parts of the questions.

Centres will note the way in which General Studies is changing with an increased emphasis upon thinking skills. The shift is away from the recall of general topics to the analysis of information, with a view to coming to a reasoned conclusion. In this respect the subject has much to offer to the broader education of the A level candidate as well as informing their other studies.

Some examiners noted the poor quality of the written word in some Centres. Others noted the weakness of mathematical skills in some schools and colleges. Where these two deficiencies coincided candidates tended to achieve very modest marks. In both cases Centres are encouraged to expand the experience of candidates in problem solving and their ability to compose an extended piece of text.

It is pleasing to note that the vast majority of candidates followed the rubric and that nearly everyone managed their time effectively.

Question 1

This question involved a series of short questions focused upon the scientific topic of light and sight. Candidates were given a series of diagrams to show how lenses can correct deficiencies in sight. They were then asked how improved sight might improve people's lives in general and children at school in particular. The question concluded with a diagram showing how a prism can change the direction of light and a photograph of a person using a periscope. The candidates were asked to deduce how two prisms could be used to make a periscope.

- 1 (a) Most candidates were able to name four senses other than sight. Some used the conventional terms whilst others translated them into everyday usage terminology. Both styles were acceptable to examiners.
- (b) (i) The focus here was upon the different ways in which the two lenses shown in the diagrams corrected sight. Marks were reserved for the concepts of convergence and divergence.
- A considerable number of candidates wrongly linked the convex lens with long sight and the concave lens with short sight. This was despite the labels on the diagram showing the reverse. Correction of the path of light so that it fell upon the retina was rewarded.
- (ii) The majority of candidates were able to suggest two ways in which the correction of sight improved the quality of life for people. Those who lost marks here tended to write in too general terms.
- (c) Candidates did really well in suggesting why the correction of sight could improve behaviour and learning for young children at school. They showed remarkable perception and sensitivity in many of their answers.

- (d) This question asked candidates to show how two prisms could be used to create a periscope. A diagram showing the way in which a prism transmits light was supplied. The task for candidates was to use the diagram to work out how two prisms could function as a periscope.

Some candidates clearly completed the question by recall whilst others used the resource. Other candidates recalled their previous knowledge but in some cases used mirrors rather than prisms. Some failed to use the prisms to transmit the light in such a way as to function as a periscope. Some did position the prisms correctly but placed arrows on the light path in the wrong direction.

Those candidates accepting the invitation to use a diagram found it helpful in displaying their ideas.

- 2 This question invited the candidates to work out how long it took to erect a stone obelisk. Candidates were given the dimensions of the obelisk and the size of the cubic blocks to be used. They were also given a variety of pieces of information about the capacity of the workforce to lay the stone blocks.

The complexity of the task lay in two directions. First the number of blocks needed had to be calculated and this involved conversion between cubic metres and cubic centimetres. Some candidates demonstrated that they did not know how to calculate the volume of a solid rectangular column. Other found difficulty in converting between the units.

The second major challenge lay in using unfamiliar language and a variety of information to calculate the capacity of the workforce building the obelisk. Candidates selected a variety of pathways through this task. Those able to assimilate all the information were usually successful though some did reveal poor arithmetic skills.

A point for some capable mathematicians is that they must be able to communicate the way in which they achieved their answer. Some took short cuts, made mistakes and lost unnecessary marks. The ability to communicate to the reader is just as important for the mathematician as it is for other disciplines.

As part of the marking of this question, examiners operated an 'error carried forward' system so that candidates were not penalised for an early arithmetic slip. This meant they could achieve method marks even if the figures they had calculated were incorrect.

Examiners found that the question differentiated well. Many candidates gained near to full marks and some just made a small arithmetic slip. In some Centres the candidates were less successful and made only a token attempt at the question. They clearly had little experience of problem solving where a mathematical base was needed.

Centres are reminded that candidates are allowed to bring a calculator to this examination.

- 3 This question asked candidates to suggest reasons for the decline in fertility in the UK between 1950 and 2000. This was a popular question and candidates offered a wide range of possible reasons. Prominent amongst

the reasons were contraception and a range of issues related to social change and woman's role in society. These included women delaying having a family so that they could pursue a career, the cost of family life and the desire for material possession and vacations before having children.

A number included the role of abortion but failed to link its availability to the decline in fertility.

In the section on contraception the candidates showed that they were well informed and wrote with expertise on the potential longer term effects.

Some candidates found difficulty in placing events in the 1950s. They appeared to suggest conditions more appropriate to Third World countries or Victorian times in the United Kingdom.

Centres should remind students that when they have the opportunity to answer a question such as this, which has one major task, they can access higher marks either by giving a range of reasons or by selecting two or three and developing them in some depth. One way of increasing depth is to include personal understanding or experience of events. Another is to speculate on the changing meanings of fertility and family during the period under scrutiny. Either of these routes gives access to the AO3 marks.

- 4 This question listed for candidates a number of innovations that can be related to developments linked to space exploration. Candidates were asked to select the two that they felt had been of greatest benefit to people and the one that had offered least. Popular choices for those giving benefits included satellite navigation, newer fuels, safety equipment and satellite images. Those innovations thought to offer least to society included 'Teflon' and information on the origins of the universe.

In terms of positive outcomes candidates included information on the monitoring of global climate change and atmospheric deterioration. Some high scoring candidates noted that their chosen options did have negative aspects as well as their dominantly positive ones. Candidates find this skill of balance quite difficult. They can often select an option and support it but find it a greater challenge to also point out its weaknesses

One of the options for which candidates struggled to develop a justification was 'co-operation between nations'. Better candidates cited globalisation, international trade, world wide communications and the avoidance of war. However many candidates appeared to lack a view of the international systems that condition so much of life today.

Perhaps the least satisfactory aspect of the better answers was their lack of any reference to space exploration.

- 5 This was the least popular of the questions in Section B. This was a disappointment to examiners. However the better answers to the question showed a pleasing grasp of the features of a good experimental design.

A good understanding of the steps in an investigation is a valuable tool. It allows the reader of reports to analyse the commentary with greater understanding. This skill can be applied to a wide range of contexts. Centres are encouraged to give greater attention to the idea of critical reading.

A small number of candidates penalised themselves by writing a comparison of the three suggestions given in the question. This was clearly not the main focus.

Summary

This was a well prepared cohort. Candidates appeared to have energy and enthusiasm to tackle the tasks set. They had clearly been prepared to face scientific and mathematical challenges.

Once again Centres are asked to require students to include the question numbers in the spaces provided on the front cover of the answer booklet. If Examinations Officers could instruct invigilators to require this of students it would be helpful. Examiners are not allowed a great deal of time to mark these scripts. They tend to mark by the question. Without question numbers on the front of scripts additional time had to be spent by examiners inserting the question number for candidates.

F733 Domain Exploration: Applying Synoptic Skills

General Comments

Candidates engaged well with the paper, and although they clearly found its range and extent challenging, very few of them failed to complete both sections and hand in a complete script. All Examiners felt that the paper was of appropriate difficulty. Some candidates seemed to have spent too long on Section A [especially Question 4] and thereafter struggled to cover their essay topic thoroughly.

Some colleagues also felt that some candidates had not enjoyed focused preparation in lessons for the new style of questions in Section A, despite specimen materials having been available to Centres for a long time. In such circumstances candidates had to rely on their intelligence and common sense in tackling a range of questions in diverse styles.

Although the standard of communication was generally acceptable and often very secure, it is again a cause for concern that many candidates' handwriting was difficult to decipher. There was a small number of scripts where Examiners had to deduce what candidates were trying to say from the context. This situation is obviously a function of the fact that most candidates now produce extended writing [when they do] using a computer, and rarely write extended essays by hand. Centres could perhaps assist their Examining colleagues by monitoring their candidates' presentation more closely.

That said, the first examination of this new specification seemed to offer candidates an interesting and challenging paper with questions accessible to the whole ability range. Weaker candidates often achieved most of their marks in Section A, whilst better candidates often did equally well on both sections.

Individual Questions

Section A

Question 1

Many candidates scored full marks on this question, with a majority identifying hypothesis, theory and experiment correctly and offering a sound amplification, frequently using good examples and demonstrating a secure understanding of scientific principles.

Question 2

Most candidates offered a workable classification - typically Food/Retail/Services - although some then found it difficult to offer a justification which went beyond providing a group label. Better candidates often offered quite sophisticated analysis of their groupings, and most managed to find an acceptable subdivision. Candidates who had made unworkable classifications in the first place naturally found subdivision more difficult.

Question 3

This question differentiated well, and many found it difficult. About half of the entry correctly identified Extract B as the novel [The Cruel Sea, Nicholas Monsarrat, Cassell, 1954] but choosing the wrong extract did not prevent candidates from scoring useful marks. The point of the question was the skills involved in identifying features of style, language, tone and address. A wrong decision did not prevent candidates from making out at least a workable case for their choice.

Those who made a correct choice often scored full marks by pointing out the distinction between history and fiction. Whereas history deals in fact, fiction deals in feelings evoked in relation to them.

Question 4

It cannot be pointed out too often that a careful reading of the question is crucial to sound examination technique, and this question makes the point very forcefully. Candidates were asked to outline the skills they would need to produce a research paper, and indeed a small number of them did combine an effective integration of skills with a well developed project, linking these with issues of accuracy, authority and interest. But a significant number of very able candidates simply described in detail a methodology and completely ignored the skills needed to undertake a successful project.

Section B

Question 5

This was the most popular of the optional questions, and the level of achievement was correspondingly wide, from low Level 2 to the top of Level 5. Most candidates cited a range of effects on individuals and communities, though all but the most able struggled with the concept of culture. There was much effective use of local knowledge, which often led to a balanced answer which referred to the positive aspects of clone towns [eg the enhancement of individuals' spending power]. It was important in this question to achieve balance - the cloning of towns both offers benefits and incurs losses and better candidates often cited good ranges of these. Weaker answers lacked both balance and range, and a small number of vitriolic rants against capitalism found their way into the lower levels. This question proved to be a good differentiator.

Question 6

The response to this question varied according to ability, writing skills and scientific knowledge. Better answers were clear on the distinction between science as an objective practice based on empirical knowledge and the moral responsibility of scientists themselves. Such candidates often combined this understanding with some high quality scientific AO1. Genetic Engineering was the most popular topic, followed by Artificial Intelligence, where candidates often showed limited understanding typically based on robotics [often in science fiction]. Weaker candidates often wrote an introductory paragraph about the neutrality of science and then ignored the moral responsibility of scientists, writing instead a straightforward essay on [eg] the benefits and drawbacks of genetic engineering. While this was often done in acceptable detail - IVF, designer babies, GM crops and DNA surgery - it was difficult to award such answers more than level 3. This question seemed to differentiate well among the higher ability candidates.

Question 7

This question was less popular than expected, and attracted a cohort of candidates many of whom wrote straightforward responses based on the three sources, typically seeing them as signifying a decline in the quality of journalism. Such answers typically gained a level 3 mark which varied in the level according to the evidence of links to social progress or decline. Better candidates produced more balanced answers, pointing out that the yellow press was as strong in Victorian times as was more responsible journalism. They also cited the recent MP's expenses scandal as evidence that strong investigative journalism still takes place. The best answers were those who wrote of the relationship of press and society as an interactive one in which each influenced and moulded the other. Again this question differentiated well.

Summary

In summary, Examiners felt that candidates had taken the paper seriously and tried hard to meet its challenges. This was evidenced by the lack of spoiled papers as well as by the quality - and quantity - of many well presented and accomplished scripts from Centres who had clearly prepared candidates with high quality and well focused teaching.

F734 Culture, Science and Society: Making Connections

General comments

This was the first session of the A2 papers for the new specification which came into effect in September 2008. The layout for this paper followed the format familiar from the previous specification: a 1 hour and 30 minute paper with two compulsory questions and source material(s).

The entry for this examination was in line with that of previous years. Most candidates approached the examination seriously and there was increased evidence of planning in relation to previous years. This is to be both commended and encouraged. It is also pleasing to note the progress which has been made from the short pieces of extended writing at AS and the fully formed essays of A2. Centres are to be congratulated on this.

Examiners commented positively on the breadth of knowledge candidates had of both volunteering and electronic communications. The sources and the questions appeared to have enabled candidates to both celebrate and question social, cultural, and scientific developments.

In general communication was clear but examiners noted some issues with the quality of handwriting and also with spelling rather than with grammatical errors. Whilst it is acknowledged that candidates are by necessity 'writing at speed' this should not result in a sacrifice to legibility. It might be useful for prospective candidates to practise this skill as it is required in a number of situations other than the General Studies examination.

In addition it appears that candidates are making better use of their time within the examination. There were few papers where the second question was either not attempted at all or was hindered by poor time management, but nevertheless there were still a significant number of candidates whose response to questions were not of equal length.

The aim of the source material is to offer the candidates a springboard upon which to fashion their response. In this respect it is acceptable for candidates to refer to the source either explicitly or implicitly. However, wholesale copying of sections of the source will not allow access to higher marks.

Within the new specification the balance of the assessment objectives is more evenly balanced than in the previous specification; however, high marks cannot be gained for work which is purely descriptive or fails to include personal experience or response. The purpose of the paper is to elicit responses which debate issues and offer opinions as the result of a balanced discussion rather than a description of the contents of the source(s). Candidates should be encouraged to include and develop relevant personal experience. Indeed this is a feature of the questions within this examination.

In order to take a synoptic view, candidates need to be able to span the three domains of science, society and culture. The questions asked candidates to do this and in general they responded well. Of the three domains candidates found it easier to draw upon their experiences of the social domain; they found the cultural domain most challenging.

Centres may wish to consider how they introduce more cultural perspectives for their candidates. The definition of the cultural domain, as used in General Studies, can be found in the specification. In essence it includes beliefs, values and religion, the role of the media, their experience and understanding of creative work and the beliefs and values of minority groups.

Individual questions

Question 1

This question provided three resources and candidates made good use of them. They then developed answers related to volunteering drawing upon each domain. The key point in the question was the extent to which volunteering offered benefits to society. Most candidates were able to suggest benefits drawn from each domain. Each of the resources was used to good effect: blood donation often being the main thrust of consideration in respect of science. In addition a majority of candidates were able to cite personal experience in support of their answers. The more able candidates discussed the 'extent of benefit' whilst keeping in mind negative aspects. Clearly the candidates found it much harder to find negatives.

More able candidates were able to show "very good awareness of the ways in which information can be interpreted." This was generally evidenced by considering negatives. Some interpreted "extent" in terms of "It has a large effect" or it has "a massive effect" or "it is vital to society" and then went on to discuss positives in an effort to support this. Whilst a number of these were competent answers, ignoring alternative viewpoints did weaken the argument somewhat and necessarily limited the consideration of "extent" as required by the question set.

Examiners noted that few candidates gave a definition of what they felt was the essence of volunteering. Although this was not an explicit requirement of the question, in many cases this would have helped to develop a more directed argument and given purpose and direction to the essay.

It was noted that some weaker candidates confused the National Health Service with the National Trust.

Question 2

Question was concerned with the impact of electronic communication. There were three resources and candidates used these to define their field of response. They were clearly very familiar with the latest developments in mobile telephones but also well informed on internet sites and the impact of e-mail; for example several candidates pointed out that Facebook has more than a merely social function, it can also have a political role. A broad range of information was used with only a small percentage becoming technical resulting in a list of facilities available on a mobile phone. Many candidates pointed out that the varied means of networking enable ideas and feelings about social problems to be disseminated quickly across a wide spectrum of people and societies.

It was pleasing that they were also well informed on the recent policy of closing branch post offices and some of the potential implications. While many regretted the gradual demise of the local post office, they balanced this by pointing out that intimacy and literacy need not necessarily be casualties of inevitable technological change.

In this question the candidates were more able to offer positive and negative impacts in a more equal measure than in question 1. The candidates demonstrated a pleasing openness to new developments and such things as cultural exchange. They recognised the pitfalls of some modern electronic developments. Some were open in admitting that they failed to resist the attractions of some developments, despite the dangers.

Cyber bullying was often cited as a negative, along with obesity as a result of not going out to socialise (often termed being "lazy") and pubs/cafes suffering from loss of customers, who chose "the convenience of socialising without leaving home".

Report on the Units taken in January 2010

A good number identified the effect on language of text /Facebook speak such as LOL ,g8, cul8r,2moro, and commented on the negative effect of 'online socialising' which might result in the inability to judge body language and facial expression as a result of fewer opportunities to practise in "real life".

Balance was often a feature of the stronger answers and not all candidates agreed with the suggestion made in the question. Some were able to offer convincing and compelling arguments for a positive impact.

Summary points

In preparing for future examinations Centres are encouraged to offer candidates the opportunity to discuss a range of issues across all domains, and, in the light of this examination, in particular relation to the cultural domain. Candidates should also ensure that they always consider a 'balance' of views before reaching a final conclusion. This will offer the opportunity for candidates to access the higher marks.

Centres are asked to remind candidates about the use of appropriate English Language within their responses. Slang terms which are in common parlance for teenagers are not appropriate for the more formal medium of the examination room.

Centres are asked to remind candidates to number the questions in the order in which they are attempted, and to note this on the front of the answer booklet.

Centres are thanked for their work in encouraging candidates to approach this examination with energy and enthusiasm.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE General Studies (H479)
Advanced Subsidiary GCE General Studies (H079)

January 2010 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
F731	Raw	120	92	83	74	65	56	0
	UMS	140	112	98	84	70	56	0
F732	Raw	60	45	40	35	30	26	0
	UMS	60	48	42	36	30	24	0
F733	Raw	100	68	62	56	50	45	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
F734	Raw	100	72	66	60	54	48	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie 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	7.3	22.4	47.1	70.0	87.2	100.0	4407

4407 candidates aggregated this series for Advanced Subsidiary GCE General Studies (H079).

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums/index.html>

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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