

## **General Studies**

Advanced GCE A2 H479

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H079

# **Examiners' Report**

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**June 2011**

**HX79/R/11**

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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**

In this introduction, the views of the senior examination team focus on the key points and issues that have arisen during the summer season. Centres are complimented for the effort that is being made in order to prepare candidates for such a demanding examination, which requires the deployment of many diverse skills. Examiners noted sustained engagement with a wide range of subject matter, producing interesting responses of high quality. However, for F732 (The Scientific Domain) Centres are asked to carefully note the range of specification content as there was evidence of insufficient rigour in exploring the full extent of the subject matter.

At AS level, time management is critical. Candidates must plan, think about, write, and review their work with special attention paid to the limited time available. Mark allocations are always a carefully judged indicator of how much material is required, and how much time should be spent on questions. Time management is an important work and life skill that is particularly crucial in A Level General Studies examinations.

At A2, there is clear evidence that the concept of thinking and writing synoptically is being applied by a large number of candidates. In addition, the presentation of ideas in a sequenced and structured way has had a major impact on the level of attainment reached by many candidates. The use of personal experience as well as subject connections, and an awareness of the important elements of extent and limitation, have been key features of some of the high quality of work seen this summer. However, candidates must be reminded that when source material is provided along with the question, this is there as a guide and stimulus to them, not as the sole evidence to be used in the essay.

The quality of handwriting, and the fundamental requirement for clearly structured, coherent responses, remains of concern. In an era where work produced by candidates in centres is predominantly word processed, Centres are reminded that most public examinations require candidates to submit a response in their own handwriting and that it is essential for the assessor to be able to read the response easily and without ambiguity.

General Studies remains a highly desirable subject alongside other A levels, when making a University application. It offers a measure of student thinking skills and analytical skills. The maintaining of the integrity, vibrancy and relevance of the specification therefore remains the principal aim of the senior examining team.

# F731 The Cultural and Social Domains

## General Comments

The Cultural and Social Domains cover a very wide range of specification content and Examiners recognise that this is a challenge to all candidates. Nevertheless, it is pleasing to report the continued success and level of achievement demonstrated during this series. This confirms that Centres are meeting the demands of the paper and preparing candidates for the challenge that they face. Time constraints remain critical in the execution of this examination. It is important to recognise that due care and attention needs to be paid in relation to the management of planning, thinking, writing and reviewing. The paper is consistent in its delivery of questions that require a synthesis of ideas and the development of a supported response. This involves a range of skills which, when employed effectively and strategically, demonstrate a student's ability to organise and present a rational and considered case – skills that underpin the structure of most Higher Education courses in the UK.

Overall, time management was good and Examiners noted a marked improvement in candidates' ability to allocate this in an effective and economical way. The number of marks available for each question is a clear indicator of how much information is required. However, it remains a concern that, often, far too much material is presented in support of answers that are worth very few marks. In Sections A and C the questions are clearly structured and, in many cases, ask for a specific number of items to be identified. Providing lengthy and wordy answers to questions worth very few marks wastes time and can gain no extra credit.

Essays were largely well balanced, looking at more than one viewpoint and drawing on the strength of personal experience. There was clear evidence of a plan being employed (mentioned in previous reports), focusing on the essays key themes and including a succinct conclusion that consisted of a tight summary or imaginative projection.

## Section A

### Question 1

- a) The vast majority of candidates found it difficult to access the full three marks. In these questions, candidates need to go beyond re-stating ideas from the text (often in the same language) or providing a response that resembled a piece of literary criticism. There is a need to provide a full and supported response that includes three pieces of information. In interpreting the phrase *health professional* it was found that only two pieces of information were offered such as being medically trained or doctor. *Postcode lottery* confused many candidates who failed to engage with the idea that this was one of the more controversial aspects of NHS medical services and their fair distribution across the UK.
- b) Answers to this question were generally good and clearly expressed. In the first part, many candidates presumed that the suggestion that a woman should be able to have an abortion within 72 hours of first contacting a health professional meant that all women would be having early abortions. Some even interpreted this to mean within 72 hours of the woman finding out she was pregnant or, in extreme cases, of conceiving. In the second part, it was interesting to note the number of students who made comments along the lines of "they may prefer a doctor as they don't want a woman doing it" or "they may want a nurse because it is a woman". There still seems to be an overall assumption that all doctors are men and that all nurses are women! Many ignored the fact that the question specifically states 'trained' nurses and wrote about the issue that they would not be trained.

- c) The question aimed to offer two different approaches to the subject, from different perspectives. In some cases, careless reading of the question resulted in the misinterpretation of *adoption* and *abortion* or merging the two together in the same response to produce a scenario where abortion was argued against adoption or vice versa. Careful reading of the question is essential. A number headed the response with the adoption question and then offered arguments for and against abortion in terms of rights. Many seemed to think they that the question required a discussion of abortion and bringing in ideas from both of the two bubbles. – sometimes this was even reflected in some bizarre spelling and confusion of the two words suggesting that the two terms had not been recognised as separate or, more likely, misread by some. However, it is clearly an issue that has often been carefully considered either in Centres or by the candidates themselves and, overall, answers were thoughtful and well balanced. Candidates who were able to present rational, balanced arguments offering two different viewpoints received high marks. There was no requirement to state a preference or a personal viewpoint in this question.

## Section B

### Question 2

The question involved a synthesis of ideas connected with *indoctrination* and *education*. Many candidates understood the meaning of both terms and used their wider knowledge to illuminate and expand their responses. The best candidates wrote a solid introduction and conclusion to the essay and spent some time exploring the idea of the difference between the two concepts with varied and interesting illustration. There were some excellent responses involving the comparison of different countries' culture and education and historical references such as Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia or Communist China. The thorough exploration of both viewpoints invariably led to a solid balanced answer. Unfortunately, the nature of the question did result in some students becoming over-indulgent - presenting unsupported statements, such as both words mean exactly the same thing. Some candidates focused a little too much on personal anecdotes from their own experience of school lessons. This at times meant that the wider picture was blurred. In one case, the suggestion was that the wearing of school uniform was an attempt by the government to indoctrinate them into societal conformity!

### Question 3

Responses to this very popular question illustrated how candidates can miss the opportunity to score highly by failing to consider the information provided. There is clear indication in the question of on-line, internet editions, printed copies, news feeds and text alerts yet many candidate began their essay without any reference to its context and content and simply provided 'ways'. Most were aware of the increased access available for the news as well as 24-hour coverage from a number of devices. The variety of presentation was also highlighted and the fact that 'the boring bits' could now be skipped. Few gave specific examples related to the news, although the death of Osama Bin Laden (topical at the time of the examination) was regularly cited as an example of news as it happens. It was surprising how many candidates considered live television news as a current development; what was meant was the availability of 'instant' news through the development of sophisticated technology.

The question of distortion proved a problem and resulted in many unbalanced essays. Those who did understand the term often went no further than accusations of bias or 'Chinese whispers' without support. Injunctions and the press were regularly included as an example of how the availability and speed of transmission of the news could distort the truth. However many wrote about how traditional newspaper companies will go out of business and how the older generation 'who don't know how to work computers' will then have 'no way of getting the news'.

#### Question 4

Once again, examiners were disappointed by the number of candidates that did not choose to answer a question related to the Arts. A number tried to use personal experience of dance or drama classes and were not always successful in relating comments to a Community Arts Project. The key components of essays tended to be generalised comments about building confidence and the opportunity to mix with new and different people from all walks of life. One common feature was the inability to define or sustain a response about participative Arts through lack of experience. Candidates gained marks if they could draw on personal experience of an Arts Project.

Some answers talked about community matters but made no mention of any specific Arts or Project - not even a paintbrush or any form of entertainment such as Drama productions or Choirs. Weak responses talked generally about Art and its value, but did not tackle the idea of unified communities. 'The Arts' does not include a community event like a football match.

#### Section C

##### Question 5

- a) Though there were many very good interpretations of the phrases, there were also many examples of recycling words from the phrases, such as *elected member* – the member who has been elected; *electorate* – the person doing the electing; *public order* – an order for the public. Many of the words form the language for learning in the Social Domain; Examiners were disappointed not to see more evidence of understanding that could have led to the awarding of higher marks, for example the inclusion of the voting age and connections to elections at both local and national levels.
- b) The first part of the question was answered very well as candidates recognised the key issues of cost and resource allocation. In the second part, whilst the reasons were well cited there was a universal tendency not to give an adequate supporting statement that would trigger the awarding of an extra mark. Most answers rightly centred on the idea of deterrence and the need for evidence in order to prosecute.
- c) The most common issue was that of unbalanced responses that either went in to huge detail on the issue but offered virtually nothing on the strategy, or vice versa. Common themes included litter, speeding and lack of things for youths to do. However, there was evidence of some very imaginative and sensitive responses on issues such as people trafficking and homelessness. The best were able to set the scene and come up with a workable strategy with local references. The weakest stated the issue in a few words and then described the general solution with little local comment. There were marks available for communication in this question and Examiners were pleased to note the quality and accuracy of many responses.

#### Section D

##### Question 6

This essay proved a successful choice for many candidates, who wrote with strong knowledge, confidence and enthusiasm. They provided a clear definition of the term with many showing good knowledge and detail. The outcome was mostly balanced and relevant with a strong conclusion. The weaker essays tended to be simplistic or superficial, going off at a tangent and talking about issues of wages and working conditions that were not directly linked to the concept of the minimum wage. The strength of some essays lay in the ability of the candidate to relate

comments to their personal experience, but a number ignored the words 'of the system' and only focused on the amounts of money involved and how much it would or would not be helpful to an individual. There was also a common assumption that no employer was allowed to pay above the minimum wage if they wished to.

### **Question 7**

This question proved to be an unpopular choice; however, where attempted, the quality of response was generally high. The providing of advantages and disadvantages of starting a business was an easy task for some, notably those who had some business studies education. Even when technical business knowledge was slim, there was evidence of good answers based on the employment of logical, common-sense arguments. There was good use of relevant language and terminology and a good understanding. The question structure seemed to prove a solid guide and led to mostly well-structured and balanced essays. Many used examples based around current economic issues such as the need to provide more jobs or the problems with banks and start up loans.

### **Question 8**

This question was very popular, but one in which many candidates failed to perform well. Most essays floundered and only dealt with one family role. Where candidates referred to two family roles, they often failed to make them distinct from each other. Consequently, candidates often had a limited opinion. However, some outstanding candidates really did excel and produced interesting, engaging and well-resourced responses full of relevant details and examples. Some essays were rather superficial and did not get beyond the "if you have a nice family you will be nice and if you have a bad family you will be bad". It was alarming to see a significant number of prejudiced responses with generalisations such as "if you are middle class all will be well, but if you are working class you are in for a rough ride."

Sociology students used the opportunity to write about primary socialisation and referred to some of their set texts. Others wrote in a much more general way about how families affected children. Few concentrated specifically on attitude or behaviour or attempted to define them but wrote more generally about influence. So few confined themselves to two ways but instead produced a list of brief references with little development or support. The question cried out for personal experience and in the past irrelevant personal experience has been thick on the ground...but not this time. Most candidates were able to support their assertions with examples and evidence.



## F732 The Scientific Domain

### General Comments

During this session, Examiners reported the use of good scientific knowledge, but there was still indication that some candidates did not fully understand the demands of the paper. Centres must ensure that candidates are fully conversant with the range of subject matter and material demanded by the specification, through using past papers and other supporting materials. It was pleasing to see careful attention paid to the mark allocation for each question, particularly in Question 1. Writing at length for Question 2(c), worth three marks, often resulted in an inability to manage time effectively in responding to Section B. Furthermore, marks are allocated in both sections for AO4 (communication) and therefore clarity and organisation of ideas is an important and integral part of the overall assessment of the unit.

Candidates appeared well prepared for the mathematical reasoning questions in Section A. The ability to discuss the questionnaire in Question 1 and to handle the trial and error element of Question 2 were clear indicators of this. Section A of Unit F732 requires the use of a calculator and it is important to have use of one during the examination, as well as practising mathematical exercises beforehand.

In Section B, examiners read many full and interesting answers that revealed clear engagement with the subject matter coupled with a range of supporting views and examples. The essay provides a test of the ability to present ideas and submit views and opinions. Half of the marks for the paper are available for this single task and so it is important to manage information and time effectively and economically to ensure a strong outcome.

The overall quality of written communication was good. Examiners reported the use of good vocabulary and accurate spelling in well expressed and well constructed answers. Centre must be reminded that AO4 (communication) marks are allocated in Section A as well as forming part of the assessment in Section B. Handwriting continues to be a cause for concern particularly when answers are clearly rushed.

### Section A

#### Question 1

The statistical organisation of a questionnaire was the central component of a good answer. It was clear that many candidates had been involved in designing their own questionnaires. Candidates who simply rewrote the tutor's comments did not gain high marks.

- (a) There were some good answers to this part of the question suggesting that it was too time-consuming and not feasible to give the whole population the questionnaire. Therefore a random or stratified sample would equate to a 'representative sample'. The inclusion of a range of sampling techniques gained credit. Some candidates gave ideas regarding only ethnicity, age, gender, and location for ideas of a 'sample'. The difficulty presented by the use of the whole population was often misunderstood or remained undetected. Candidates who did not gain marks here were generally those who thought that a 'representative sample' meant an idea of what the questionnaire would look like, ready for their tutor, or the process of showing the public how to fill it in.

- (b) Credit was given to answers where either 'attitudes' or 'people' were redefined. Examples of good answers included suggesting posing questions that asked people to 'agree' or 'disagree', and dealing with the narrowing down of the term 'people' including age range or profession. The use of a synonym for 'attitude' or the adding of 'opinions' and 'views' gained few marks.
- (c) There was good evidence that the concept of 'open and closed questions' was clearly understood.
- (d) The majority of candidates correctly commented on the fact that the word 'expenditure' was omitted from the outline. However the word 'further' or 'further expenditure' was rarely referred to even though it was the main focus of the investigation. Candidates who suggested that the questionnaires were expensive gained no credit.
- (e) Good responses included candidates developing a response to the comments given by the tutor, explaining how data may be collected, organising a sample, and analysing results. Occasionally, this developed through comments regarding sample size and the origin of target sample, the use of statistical spreadsheets, and data presentation.

## Question 2

This question tested candidates' ability to calculate and deduce patterns in numbers together with the skills of problem solving.

- (a) (i) and (ii) A very good understanding of the index notations was evident and most explained clearly that their answers had the same numbers that were being squared in the question. However, some answers did not include reference to the 'reversing' of the numbers in (ii).

Candidates are encouraged to read the mark allocations carefully for each of the parts of the questions as this is a clear indicator of the amount of detail that is required. Some answers contained no comments, merely the calculation. Index notation was sometimes misunderstood, for example,  $8^2 - 4^2 = 4^4$  and  $12^2 + 33^2 = 45^4$ . More experience of this skill would benefit those candidates whose mathematical skills may be weaker or less developed.

- (b) Candidates displayed a very good understanding of trial and error methods. Sometimes explanations were too lengthy but there was clear evidence of sound knowledge. Part of the solution to this question was to allocate the numbers to the particular shapes. Candidates who listed the answers, eg 10, 6 and 5, did not make it clear where their answers fitted the shapes. When simultaneous equations were used by candidates it was common to award full marks. However, a solution was often spoiled by simple arithmetical errors.

Questions such as these look for clarity of description: this was the key to gaining the maximum number of marks.

- (c) Responses were very good. Candidates showed a very good understanding of the techniques used by supermarkets to encourage spending by their customers.

## Section B

Question 4 was the most popular choice with Question 3 being the least popular. Overall, candidates displayed good extended writing skills using good scientific knowledge and time management.

### Question 3

This question required the consideration of solutions using different time scales being employed in the process of solving a scientific problem.

Candidates showed their skill and ingenuity in providing excellent examples of scientific problems and their possible solutions. Innovative examples included the rescue of the Chilean miners, coastal erosion, the volcanic eruption in Japan together with its subsequent nuclear problem and leaking oil wells. This meant that candidates could focus very clearly on the points they wanted to make, the solutions and the time scale differences.

Even though the question did not ask for a specific example, Centres should continue to encourage candidates to use relevant examples wherever possible to enhance and develop essays

Candidates saw the *short term* as a 'stop gap' whilst a project developed in the *medium* or *long term*. The idea of investing in the solution to a problem was commonly cited, therefore a *short term* approach gave scientists time to collaborate and think of ways of funding.

When Global Warming, pollution or a cure for a disease such as cancer was chosen, the time scale issue was highlighted with relevant and up to date solutions. Vague reference to time and time scales received few marks as these answers were unfocused and unspecific.

### Question 4

This question was clear in its request for examples of successes and concerns along with a definition of genetic engineering. On the whole, the term 'genetic engineering' was clearly understood with only few responses containing definitions that lacked clarity.

Insulin manufacture, vaccines, GM crops and foods, miracle rice, cystic fibrosis and hereditary diseases were some of the topics chosen for essays which scored high marks through the employment of excellent scientific understanding. In the case of GM foods and crops, examiners reported that it was rare to find a response which included the health concerns connected with these foods.

Weaker candidates wrongly included IVF as a success topic; this was often followed by 'designer babies', with some of these responses focusing too much on celebrities at the expense of the question's main theme. Although the example of 'Dolly the sheep' was often included as a success, its relevance and significance was often not developed and therefore references tended to be anecdotal.

Overall, religious and other ethical issues were the main concerns that emerged, suggesting: 'Who are we to play God?', and that testing using embryos is wrong. Where candidates placed too much emphasis on this part of the question, the outcome became unbalanced and this restricted the mark level that could be reached. Centres must continue to encourage candidates to carefully plan answers to questions that clearly ask for two sides of an issue.

## **Question 5**

This question required a balanced response concerning the subject of birth rates.

The best answers involved dealing with the growth or decline of birth rates in different societies, often using abortion and contraception as examples. When IVF was included it was dealt with in an informed and sensitive way. China's one child policy was used to highlight advantages to a particular country. Some astute candidates used abortion as an advantage, seeing that there was also a case for it to be a disadvantage, depending on the country, its politics and its religions. Other candidates placed the emphasis on the human aspects of birth, the pill and abortion, producing general responses rather than considering the concept of an overall 'birth rate'.

## **Conclusion**

The following represent key areas to consider in preparing for future examinations:

- for Section A, candidates should continue to be encouraged to practise mathematical skills, including the use of calculators, and to remember that explanations of patterns should be clear and concise
- candidates would benefit from more investigative work, designing questionnaires and data presentation
- mark allocations are very important in defining the length of a response and Centres should continue to place emphasise on this important point
- in Section B, candidates should plan their response and use relevant examples to highlight their points, as well as presented cogent and balanced arguments
- as this paper tests the Scientific Domain, Centres should continue to encourage their candidates to be exposed to advances in science and technology.

## **F733 Domain Exploration: Applying Synoptic Skills**

### **General Comments**

A large majority of candidates displayed a secure and lively engagement with a paper that was accessible and had evidently triggered their interest. The overall quality of responses was good with most candidates writing lucidly, although Examiners noted a decline in and misuse of punctuation beyond commas and full stops. Similarly, developing a paragraph from a topic sentence seems to be largely a matter of guesswork, giving rise to concern about the overall construction of complex arguments. Few scripts were illegible but a number were difficult to decipher. This is possibly a consequence of the increasing amount of schoolwork being word-processed. Centres are reminded that focused preparation for a written examination should include practise in producing handwritten answers against the clock.

A small minority of candidates found timing problematic and an even smaller number attempted all three essays. In Section B, question five proved the most popular but produced relatively few high-scoring answers. Candidates displayed a limited knowledge of the waste management, often producing anecdotal responses that failed to link the application of the hierarchy to its attendant difficulties. Question 6 produced some splendid answers, some of which received full marks. The best of these blended scholarship with personal experience to construct a response that was both readable and entertaining.

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

This question required candidates to compare differing levels of expenditure and justify them. Answers ranged from the obvious ('I would need to know what the money was spent on') to the sophisticated ('military expenditure often supports foreign aid, and so cannot usefully be distinguished from it'). Good development required the employment of examples, and these were often well focused. Commitment to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was contrasted with the military support for insurgents in Libya; aid occasioned by earthquakes or floods was clearly distinguished from chronic needs such as AIDS in sub Saharan Africa. A few candidates used the question to attack government policies in these areas.

#### **Question 2**

This question produced the best answers in Section A. The small reward gained from loyalty cards and the loss of privacy for the user were common inclusions. Some candidates developed insightful answers involving discussion of how supermarkets use their loyalty card information to manipulate prices, to design advertising campaigns, and to build elaborate databases that could be shared with business partners. Holding a loyalty card concedes much private information to retailers, and it is reassuring to know how clearly young people are aware of this.

#### **Question 3**

The question involved a paradox: those who advertise on television do so in the belief that television influences behaviour, but those who make programmes often claim that it does not. To develop this idea, candidates needed to reflect on the information supplied by the question, and its implications, before answering. Very few actually did so, with the result that this question produced the weakest answers in Section A. Fact 2 was often omitted and it was common to see candidates develop arguments for and against violence on television.

#### **Question 4**

This was a straightforward question and many candidates answered it effectively. Although it was disappointing to read that some believed that The House of Lords and the Monarchy held ultimate power in this country, most answers were clear and exemplified. Question 4d produced a few interesting answers, but most candidates played safe by referring to doctors or teachers.

### **Section B**

#### **Question 5**

This question produced the widest range of marks. The Waste Hierarchy tended to be used as a scaffold for answers, giving straightforward examples based in homes, schools, and local communities. The identifying of problems proved more challenging, this element in the essay proving to be a good discriminator. Better answers often saw candidates making synoptic points about the culture of environmental awareness with weaker ones showing limited range and insight. The meaning of Recovery in the context of the question was often misunderstood. A Level 5 answer needed a strong knowledge base as well as analytical skills.

#### **Question 6**

Assessors were unanimous in their view that this question produced many excellent answers. It was clear that many candidates had received detailed and informed teaching on the issue, and wrote erudite, exemplified, balanced answers. Surprisingly few candidates evangelised their viewpoints, although many used these to clinch their conclusions. Even more surprisingly, there were few citations of the works of Dawkins, Hitchens, and Grayling, suggesting that these authorities were not studied in any detail. Weaker candidates turned the question into a religion versus science polemic, and the level of scientific knowledge was often dismayingly low ('the Big Bang and Evolution between them have disproved the existence of God'). This question posed an overtly synoptic opportunity to those who attempted it, and it was pleasing to see this opportunity often exploited to its fullest.

#### **Question 7**

This question produced some highly politicised rants that were stronger on assertion than tangible argument, but the majority of answers were based securely on the source material. The characteristics most often identified were the control of the media, the blaming of a minority for all the ills of society, and the smearing of political opponents. Often, these points were clearly illustrated and supported. The differentiator in this question was the identification and evaluation safeguards. It was here that even the best candidates often struggled. Authorities such as the European Court of Human Rights were often criticised for their failings rather than celebrated for their good work.

It is clear that, where candidates had benefited from a structured and organised General Studies course that enabled them to learn and practise the essential thinking and analytical skills demanded by the specification, they displayed more secure knowledge and confident examination technique than those entered with little or no preparation. The experience of Examiners during this summer session confirms that Centres are becoming more familiar with the demands of the examination and that candidates are tackling this demanding paper with spirit and enthusiasm.

## **F734 Culture, Science and Society: Making Connections**

### **General Comments**

It was pleasing to note the positive way in which the majority of candidates approached this question paper. Only a small number of them revealed anything less than a mature attitude towards constructing a reasoned response. It is pleasing to note that the candidates entered for this unit had opinions based on knowledge and understanding rather than simply conjecture and flights of fancy.

Clearly, many students read and reflected upon the source material before commencing their responses. This was an important indicator of their full engagement with the subject matter. In addition, time management has improved with candidates giving equal weight to both questions.

In order to access the higher mark levels, all parts of the question needed to be explored and addressed. This includes coverage of each domain (cultural, social, and scientific), as well as making connections between them. Personal knowledge and experience, linked to the consideration of any issues of extent or limitation, are further ingredients of an answer that will display quality of thought and a thorough evaluation of the subject matter. A conclusion which includes a balanced review of the key ideas, or a projection based on the implications of the arguments presented, is a valuable element of an essay at this level. At times, Examiners found themselves reading essays that were incomplete due to omission of this important part of the essay structure.

Examiners continue to observe basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Homophone errors persist and punctuation is often sacrificed when candidates become over-involved with their ideas or are writing in a hurry. The use of paragraphs to separate ideas would help to resolve some of these issues.

However, the greatest concern of examiners during this session was the quality of handwriting. Illegibility presented serious problems in understanding some candidates' work. Centres are reminded that procedures are available for the use of word processing and of amanuenses to assist those candidates who may genuinely require support in this area.

### **Question One**

The sources for this question related to the issue of Human Genetic Engineering. The first talked about the removal of a gene known to cause breast cancer from a foetus; the article was written after the birth of the baby. The second source gave information about the creation of sperm cells in order to research cures for infertility. Candidates had to comment on the issues relating to Human Genetic Engineering, make connections between the domains, and to consider how far research should continue in the future.

When considering cultural issues, there were some very informed discussions about the teachings of a range of religious groups and their individual standpoints. Often candidates were quite observant when considering how knowledge of a personal illness might have an impact on religious beliefs. A number highlighted the thorny issue of saving money in the treatment of illnesses such as cancer in later life as opposed to the cost of 'screening during pregnancy.'

Candidates were able to introduce personal experience into their response, speaking in a moving but focused manner about issues relating to their own experiences of a range of

diseases. Sickle Cell Anaemia, Cockayne's Syndrome, and Leukaemia were some of the examples cited, as well as consideration of the issues relating to Cancer generally and the effects that the disease has on families.

Weaker responses referred almost exclusively to the sources and became more of a commentary. This invariably resulted in the production of disjointed responses and contrary conclusions. The task involved the use of the resources to construct an overview of the issue and to offer a balanced opinion rather than a critical response to the specific cases outlined in the sources.

In considering how far research can go, there were often some informed as well as imaginative responses. It was pleasing to note that candidates were able to draw on their knowledge of a number of other subject areas (History, Biology, English Literature, Media/Film studies, for example) to broaden the scope of their arguments.

Overall, Examiners were impressed by the level of knowledge and the maturity with which candidates approached this question.

## **Question Two**

The source for this question was an article about the lives of children followed by comments and reaction from public figures. The question required candidates to consider the development of a 'me-first' society, followed by the extent to which individualism could be considered a benefit to society.

Some candidates reviewed the source in detail and made comments on every element. This resulted in answers that were occasionally difficult to follow, as the demands of the question had not been met fully. Most candidates were able to articulate opinions about the report, and to consider how developments (in each domain) might contribute to the 'me-first' society. Often the scientific domain was omitted or not handled well. Candidates would mention that there were a number of advances in science but fail to name one. This restricted access to higher levels as the resulting essay would be, at best, cursory and superficial. However, essays that linked ideas between the three domains, made connections, and provided a focused, fluent balanced argument were amply rewarded by Examiners.

A number of candidates were able to introduce their own experience in relation to their own locality. This included local news stories, and community initiatives. Surprisingly, there were many who considered that the rise in teenage pregnancies was due to children feeling they were 'ready' to have children. By speaking from direct personal experience, some candidates were able to be both reflective and objective in their viewpoints.

Benefits were most often considered in relation to the achievements of individuals within history or the scientific fields: Martin Luther King; Nelson Mandela, Watson and Crick, and the Curies were among positive examples of individualism. In addition, some movements such as the Suffragettes were regarded as 'individualistic' in relation to their cause.

A small number of candidates were unable to focus on the requirements of the question and offered their own opinions of who was to blame for the current economic and social decline. Most often, the person responsible was named as Margaret Thatcher, the former Conservative Prime Minister, or 'working mums' who had chosen their career before their family. A general conclusion appeared to be that individualism was essential to the smooth running of a society but this needed balancing with socialist ideas and principles. A few candidates were able to consider individualism and the rise (or demise) of the 'me first' society at the same time instead of treating them separately. Not all of these attempts were successful.



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