



General Certificate of Education

GCE Communication and Culture

COMM1

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - January series

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Unit One: Understanding Communication and Culture

Overview

The majority of candidates performed very well. This was especially pleasing in the light of the significant changes that were made to the specification and to the form of assessment when GCE Communication and Culture replaced GCE Communication Studies. This paper already feels well established.

This year all centres also have access to detailed statistical information through the Enhanced Results Service. This provides a break down of marks for each candidate on a question by question basis.

This was the first January entry and proved popular with centres. More than 60% of candidates were sitting the paper for the first time. These were likely to be new students three months into their AS course. This was reflected in some candidates' responses which appeared slightly 'naïve' or lacking in sophistication.

General issues were:

- All candidates seemed prepared for the demands of the paper. There was very little work in level 1.
- Comparatively few candidates failed to complete the paper. It was pleasing to see how much candidates were able to write in the time. If candidates did not complete all questions it was usually question 3c and not question 4 which was not answered.
- The examining team felt that this was an enabling paper with very few questions misunderstood or not attempted by candidates. The examiners were able to use the full mark range and confidently differentiate between the levels.
- One consistent feature of the best answers was the centrality of the key concepts; a constant and explicit application of **power, value, identity** and **representation**. This is what the questions are really about and these theoretical constructs can bring more easily a level of sophistication and understanding to everyday experience.
- Conversely there were still examples of candidates who were using A2 theory to no great effect, for example trying to introduce Marxism when an understanding of power would have been sufficient to provide an interesting discussion.

COMM1 is a 'reading' paper: reading Culture, reading Communication, reading a text, and reading the Meanings and Practices of Everyday Life. It is therefore largely a test of the degree to which the course has given candidates a sound knowledge and understanding of the key concepts. This remains the most significant change to the specification and the assessment and does present a more robust challenge to teachers and students alike.

Question One: 'Culture'

This question on socialisation/ enculturation worked very well. There were a good range of responses across the three options. 'Family' was the most popular, but the answers on 'school' often achieved the highest marks. There were some spectacular answers on 'role models'. This more open question was enjoyed by the more able candidates. A key performance indicator

was the ability to move from personal/ethical to cultural values (right and wrong in context). It is in this question that culture should be addressed. Ideas like the family need therefore to be dealt with in this context.

The balance of conceptual knowledge and application to personal experience is an issue here, which may be more of a problem for candidates who have not had the full year for these ideas to settle. 'School' perhaps allowed a little more distance than 'family'. There were perceptive and still personal discussions across a range of significant issues: on gender expectations and empowered female celebrities; on how the high/pop culture debate played into family trips to museums or the school curriculum; on the playground as key site of socialisation; on the ways schools encourage multiculturalism and diversity.

This question also confirmed a previous message that this section is **not** about the High/Popular Culture Debate.

Question Two: 'Communication'

Question Two is perhaps the most familiar to those who taught the legacy specification. This was apparent in that most candidates had a good knowledge of the key terms, for example self-esteem and self-concept. However the security offered by explicit knowledge combined with limited time often led to rather staid and straightforward responses: there was much less diversity in the answers. Two thirds of candidates wrote about 'appearance' and only 5% answered on 'paralanguage'.

Moreover security of content also seemed to make its application to well-chosen examples more difficult and thus less frequent. Equally those who gave plenty of examples often lacked the concepts.

Question Three: 'Toolkits'

This section is more of a test of knowledge than a text analysis task. The text is there primarily to provide material that candidates can use to exemplify their knowledge of the Communication and Culture toolkit. It is a stepped activity with marks getting progressively more difficult to acquire.

3a) gave most candidates a positive start. Candidates were given a key semiotic phrase and asked to apply it. The vast majority of candidates were able to do this well.

3b) was more demanding and as a result was less well done. 'Connotation' was understood but some candidates did not focus on the lettering as the question required.

3c) proved difficult for many candidates. Candidates were either helped or hindered by how they interpreted the word 'readings'. The best approach was to talk about the woman who could be a) attractive to a male audience or b) a problematic representation. Other alternative readings were valid but often not as valuable. Some of the most confident responses used a preferred versus oppositional reading approach, though finding such readings was still sometimes problematic.

Question Four: 'AS synoptic'/'Communication and Culture'

Question Four could have been perceived as a little more 'academic' than the equivalent question last summer. The critical tools offered in the question however provided ample scaffolding to a thoroughly reliable set of responses. It was tackled with real enthusiasm by many. The responses were diverse, but nearly always relevant.

The majority of candidates focused on just two of the listed everyday practices but several 'did' all four. As it was depth of understanding that was important one everyday practice would have been more than sufficient.

Final thoughts

These candidates were clearly well-taught and knowledgeable and much credit should go to their teachers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results statistics** page of the AQA Website.