



Certificate of Education

General Studies 2761 *Specification A*

GENA3 Culture and Society

Report on the Examination *2010 examination - January series*

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(GENA3 A2 Culture and Society)

The paper was very accessible and there were very few rubric infringements. Almost all candidates seemed to have the time to finish the paper and there were some exceptionally good answers.

Candidates seemed to enjoy writing essays about both texting and computer usage and that did lead to a preponderance of answers to questions 3 and 9 but all questions elicited some responses.

Section A

There were more accessible extracts this time and the tasks were correspondingly more straightforward than in January. The same weaknesses applied as in the last paper: contextualisation.

In **Question 1** recognising the provenance of an extract frequently helped in reaching higher levels of comparison. Candidates did struggle to express the comparisons if they did not employ simple connectives such as 'on the other hand', 'nevertheless' and even 'but'.

Level 1 candidates merely described the extracts as if this automatically created a comparison. At the top end there was an awareness of, or an insight into the authorial tone of the writer or the use of language of both authors and those quoted in the texts. As in the January exam, it is worth pointing out that comparison is not simply looking at similarities – it involves an element of contrast too.

Question 2 was relatively straightforward. The greatest weakness was to ignore the element of morality in the question but in general there was a much better performance here than in January. Again there were some candidates who tried to use all 3 extracts here but the principle remains that question 2 is related to the information or area of interest of the extracts but is not dependent on it.

Candidates should also be aware of the mark allocation for section A. 20 marks in total is less than an essay in Sections B and C. There were instances of very long answers to question 1 (12 marks) and even longer attempts at question 2, which was worth only 8 marks.

Section B

Offered, as always, a choice of one essay from four possible titles. The section covers the cultural themes of the specification content and requires knowledge, analysis, arguments, development, exemplification, illustration and communication. The valid conclusions that are required should emerge from the strength of arguments contained within the essay.

Question 3 about texting was inevitably very popular. Many examples of textspeak were illustrated and the fact that candidates tended to offer the same examples (LOL especially) testified to its universality. Candidates were not afraid to use some of the more risqué examples – often with mercifully coy interpretations. There was little about the beauty of language and not a great deal of recognition that the written word in all its unabbreviated glory is still widely employed. Some very sensible points were made, however, on the reasons why texting began to be abbreviated and how language is always in a state of evolution.

Question 4 on the position of the arts in a healthy and dynamic society was the least popular here. This was not well answered by many and the concepts of a healthy society offered in the title were not often fully recognised. The healthy society required by the question was too often only thought of as an issue of physical fitness.

Question 5 on the Dawkins-backed campaign did elicit some very good and thoughtful answers, especially from those who worked out the probable context. RE and Philosophy students frequently offered challenging and knowledgeable answers with a wide variety of sources for illustration.

Question 6 was not generally treated with any depth. The offerings President Obama was regaled with rarely stepped outside the realm of ‘My 3 favourite teenage films and a tenuous and/or convoluted link with a powerful black ikon.’ Some more knowledgeable answers did much more of what we asked and offered the films as an illustration of a relevant theme and not as an opportunity to describe a popular movie.

Section C

Also comprises a choice from four titles, this time with a more social emphasis. All questions had a reasonable take up except question 10 on the press, which was surprisingly rarely attempted.

Question 7 was not simply about bankers’ bonuses and did give the opportunity for some very unfocused rants about the inequalities in society. There were some well-developed and well-informed responses but too many candidates seemed to pick this topic as one to enjoy a moan! How far candidates got really depended on their knowledge of events in the world of pensions and banking during the last two years.

Question 8 was popular and well-done. The existing First Past the Post system was dissected, with some sympathy for the numerical inequalities it engenders. Plenty of examples were given of the plight of the Lib Dems, though many seemed unaware of the contradiction when they also praised the system for keeping extreme right-wing parties out. A disproportionate amount of time was taken up on the electoral blip of closing polling stations when queues were still waiting to cast their votes. There was some useful knowledge of other systems and some candidates were very prescient about the possible use of AV.

Question 9 was overwhelmingly popular. One examiner referred to what he saw as the overwhelmingly “disturbing picture of overweight, voyeuristic, socially maladjusted and dysfunctional youths living in a twilight world of games, paedophilia, nerdy forums, virtual marriages and suicide or anorexia clubs.” Some candidates did manage to point out what they saw of advantages of the internet, but many answers lacked the balance we would have liked. The negatively expressed question (*Examine the view that using the internet can adversely affect the personal and social development of the user*) perhaps led candidates in that direction but few offered a full and accurate picture of the totality of internet use as their starting point for a reasoned and balanced discussion.

Question 10 was a surprisingly unpopular question. The most common fault in the answers was superficiality – we do often comment in these reports that essay techniques incorporating presentation of points, their development and evidence/illustration are important techniques to use to create convincing and substantial arguments. Here they were almost non-existent. A further trouble to candidates was the understanding of the concept of “double standards.” Many were able to point to instances of inappropriate treatment of women and celebrities but relatively few were able to look at those parts of the media which condemned such treatment while exploiting it elsewhere.

I repeat the advice of the first report in this series. The writing of a good essay is an important skill in most of the units of this subject which many students do not now meet at 6th form level in their other studies. Some students have this skill to a highly creditable degree; others need to be taught how to convey their viewpoint with evidence and thoroughness.

New Numbering System and New Style Answer Book

Centres are thanked for preparing so thoroughly their candidates to work with the new numbering system and the new style answer book. The majority of candidates responded well to the changes to the June 2010 exams, but where difficulties were experienced, centres are asked to draw candidates’ attention to the comprehensive range of guidance material that is available on this subject in order that they are confident about what is required of them in future examinations. Support available on this issue includes Guides for teachers and students, and specimen question papers and mark schemes showing the changes in action. All documents published in support of the changes to exams can be accessed via notices published on all qualification homepages, all subject notice boards, and on the parent and student area of the web.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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