



General Certificate of Education

General Studies 2766

Specification B

GENB4 Change

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - January series

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General Comments

Candidates have two hours in which to answer two questions on this paper: one compulsory question in Section A, and one of a choice of two in Section B, (in place of one and three quarter hours on its predecessor paper, GSB6).

With one hour at their disposal per question, candidates would be well advised to give five minutes or so to thinking what they are going to write before setting about answering the question – few writers can rely upon being irrigated by a steady stream of ideas as they write.

There is no call, though, for a ‘plan’ that involves a lot of writing to the extent of its being a first draft. All that is necessary is to jot down examples, illustrations, that come to mind on reading the question. These are what will score marks.

It is not even necessary to read all five texts supplied with the paper: Text A, on which Question 1 is based, must be read; but candidates should choose which of the two questions they will answer in Section B before reading the texts. They are called ‘texts’ now (not ‘sources’) because the hope is that they will serve as reserves of ideas in addition to those that candidates bring to the question.

Candidates need to feel that they can make sense of the question before, and aside from, their reading of the texts.

Question 1

The safest way to ensure that this question is answered fully is to answer each part of it in turn, systematically. Candidates were asked to give social, economic, and moral reasons why we should try to close the gap between the life-chances of rich and poor in the UK. (Note: they were not asked to give reasons for this gap). It would have made sense first to think about social benefits of closing it; then economic benefits; and lastly some moral justification for trying to equalise opportunities.

Having done this – and having given some real-life instances of inequality, or attempts to mitigate inequality (EMA, Sure Start, the national minimum wage) – candidates should then have gone on to consider how the gap might be closed. Measures that were realistic (nursery places for all, tax incentives to encourage philanthropy, a cap on executive bonuses) scored higher marks than those of a more fantastic sort (the closure of all independent schools, the ushering in of communism); and absence of any suggestions scored no marks at all to add to those awarded for the first part of the question.

Though Question 1 is based firmly on Text A, that text is presented only as a starting point. Since it is available to everyone it is unprofitable to rely upon it for examples. There was much (quite justified) indignation spent on the contrast between the high-spending City bankers and the tribulations of Sophia, the school cleaner and kitchen assistant; but time and space spent on re-presenting these two cases was largely wasted. There is seldom anything to be gained from quoting from the text.

A systematic laying out of reasons and strategies, illustrated by reference to actual circumstances known to candidates (or any number of examples of hardships and inequality highlighted in the print and broadcast media), was what scored marks at the higher levels.

Question 2

The question was about what fashion tells us about how our minds work; what we might infer about the way we think from the ways in which we follow, or do not follow, fashion. Though Text B was about the brain (and therefore about the mind), all that candidates might have deduced from it, in answer to this question, was that the workings of our minds are highly complex, resilient, and adaptive.

Text C ought to have been of more use – but this text was mainly about hats; candidates needed to draw on ideas of their own to say something worthwhile about our fixation on, or neglect of, fashion, and what we might infer from either about how we think – about what makes us tick as social beings.

High marks went to candidates who said something concrete about why, when, and how we preen ourselves and flaunt this, that, and the other item of dress or undress. ‘Hoodies’, burkas, and pyjamas worn to the supermarket were all possibilities; baseball caps, shell-suits, hippy kaftans, punk raggedness might all have been called in evidence of our need to make statements, to fit in, or to stand out.

Fashion, of course, does not just mean clothes: candidates who referred to what it tells us about our thinking that so many of us drive military vehicles in the urban jungle, or that we call ‘art’ what critics and collectors tell us we should, entered into the spirit of this question and scored.

Question 3

Just as it was unprofitable to make too much of ‘crossed wires’ in the brain, in answer to Question 2, so it was purposeless to argue about whether people work hard nowadays or not, or about whether Hollywood does or does not beguile us and ‘stand in’ for heaven. The question was about economic growth, and whether President Sarkozy of France has a point when he asks economists to think outside the purse.

Perhaps General Studies candidates would do well to be abreast of what is increasingly being said out loud: that happiness *can* be measured (by proxy); that this happiness – and a healthy economy – might well have something to do with equality (the subject of Question 1); and that pressures on natural resources will oblige us to re-think our old definitions of economic growth. That there are ‘limits to growth’ has been the stuff of debate (not just among savants) since the late 1960s/early 1970s. It is curious that so few candidates made reference to the green agenda in answer to this question.

It is equally curious that relatively few candidates made mention of health, education, and social and cultural engagement as features of a ‘happy’ society, though a number quoted the non-fiscal values referred to in Text D: ‘community spirit, solidarity, and leisure time’.

This was a large question – an open question, as Section B questions (at least) on this paper always are and will be. It could not be answered adequately by caricaturing Sarkozy’s initiative as a smoke-screen for a disappointing GDP. Once candidates had committed themselves to this dismissal of the question, there was little else for them to say. It is wise to assume that there are at least two sides to every question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.