**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

General Studies B   **GENB4**

(Specification 2765)

Unit 4: Change

Report on the Examination

GENB4 Change

General Comments

There is little to add to what has been said a number of times before about a well-established examination paper. It is, perhaps, worth pointing out, though, that – in order to spread the marks, and to discriminate more helpfully, but no less fairly, between the responses that do engage well with the task assigned and those that do not – examiners were asked to award a Level 2 mark (25-32 out of a total of 40) or above, to a response that supplied at least one well-worked example, by way of evidence, to support the case being made. It would not be enough for a Level 2 mark, to mention a name, or to give an undeveloped example.

Furthermore, examiners were asked to award a Level 4 mark (9-16) to a response that failed to do more than comment on the text or texts provided, without adding any fresh ideas – a response, that is, that failed to engage with the issue under review. Such a response was to be deemed not 'competent' (and, therefore, not eligible for a Level 3 mark of 17-24). Competent responses were expected to add some new thinking to that in the text(s), howbeit they fell short of evidence-based argument. It might have been enough in the past, to qualify for the median mark (20), to show understanding of the task and to answer the question by reference to the text(s). It is now explicitly stated in the rubric that candidates should illustrate their answers; only such illustration will raise marks above the median.

Question 1

What was important here was that candidates observe that the question was about 'growth', and what we understand by a country's growth. The question was not whether we should re-consider what we mean by 'economic growth', by 'social growth', and by 'environmental growth' (whatever these might be); there are many reasons, economic, social, and environmental, for new thinking about whether output is an adequate measure of a country's development, its situation, even perhaps its 'success' – and economists among others are thinking these new thoughts.

Candidates did well to begin their analysis by reference to salient information in Text A (such as the proportion of younger to older people in the population; variant interpretations of the 'good life'; and the availability of natural resources); and it was worth noticing the disparity between the rates of *economic* growth (as measured by output) of 'developed' and 'less developed' countries in the table supplied.

This information suggested to many candidates reasons why we might want to think about growth in other ways: and here key terms were 'sustainability', 'social welfare', and 'happiness'. Rapid growth on the Chinese model comes at a price (the limits to freedom; the pollution of the environment; the prodigal use of resources), as, for the same and other reasons does the 'American Dream'. Candidates were sometimes quite impressively well informed about such drawbacks, and some imagination was shown in regard to other measures of growth that might be applied. Thoughts of how large their postgraduate debts might be suggested to many that a country's stock of qualified engineers, doctors, teachers, or its cultural capital, might be suitable measures; and many chanced definitions of 'happiness' and the quality of life.

Illustration (specific comparison of the mega-rich and the dirt-poor in Mumbai; the rate at which the Amazon rainforest is being cut down; the northward migration of unemployed Africans) was what counted.

Question 2

Section B questions always sit lightly to the texts provided; this question sat more lightly to Texts B and C than most. Here, candidates were not well advised to seek inspiration from anything said about prime numbers or 'X-Factor' voting for comment about the future, though it was legitimate to suggest that people seek their excitement in very different ways.

It was, perhaps, not a good idea to deny at the outset any possibility of 'predicting' the future; the question was about likelihood, and that can fairly be based upon present trends – any planning at all has to take these into account. All that candidates had to do was to consider whether the future is likely to be more enjoyable (more fulfilling, more rewarding, more stimulating, more soul-stirring) than the past has been.

Many candidates, understandably, took their stand on the development of technology: this meant, for most, communications technology (the iPhone, the iPad, the worldwide web on the move); but it extended for many to medical technology (brain-scanning, stem-cell research), the further exploration of inner and outer space (the Large Hadron Collider, Virgin Galactic), and the development of solar, tidal and wave power. There seemed to be rather more hopeful anticipation in this context than despair, which was heartening; but the note of caution was often struck that 'excitement' might depend upon whether overall population is controlled, reserves of fresh water hold out, or the rise in global temperature is arrested. It mattered little what illustrations were chosen to justify optimism or pessimism: what did matter, as usual, was whether those illustrations were adduced as evidence in a persuasive argument.

Question 3

A response to the question about which values are most likely to endure (if any) could well be launched by reference to values enshrined in the two texts (D and E): a rejection of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation (on the assumption of the superiority of heterosexual marriage); and a rejection of slavery, predicated on racial superiority – the value, that is to say, of equality before the law. It was as well, though, for candidates not to restrict themselves to consideration of homosexuality and slavery. These (*pace* Text D, and bonded labour) are battles that have largely been fought and won, at least in the UK, so fixation on these issues was of limited interest.

Responses that rooted values in scripture, or papal edict, that denied all possibility of change, as well as responses that were entirely relativistic, were unlikely to be very convincing. More profitable was discussion of contexts in which values plainly have changed in the fairly recent past: reform of the divorce and abortion laws; the outlawing of discrimination on arbitrary grounds; and the codification of human rights at the international level.

It would have been fair to say that the respect for human life is fundamental and that this over-arching value is likely to endure; but it was more impressive when candidates could extend themselves to a discussion of how this value might be relevant in time of war, say; or in the event of painful or undignified death. Whatever values were chosen, what mattered was how their choice was exemplified and justified. Most candidates appeared to be comfortable with the abstract; but good answers were reinforced in the concrete.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion