



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

General Studies B

GENB2

(Specification 2765)

Unit 2: Space

Report on the Examination

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GENB2 Space

General Comments

Time management is becoming less of an issue and this seems to be because students are better prepared and because the revised format of Question 1 has enabled students to spend a lot less time on the calculations. As in January, very few questions were left unanswered and it was pleasing to see that very few wrote that they did not understand what was required of them. In general terms, the 10 mark questions were answered well with a clear structure: making a point, explaining it and, in many cases, giving a relevant example or illustration. The spaces left are a guide as to how much is expected and students are taking heed of that. It is a pity that a small number of students write their answer in the wrong place. Whilst this does not penalise them, it does slow the whole process down. There were some very good, clearly focused and succinct answers across all questions; there is no need to write volumes.

Too many responses, however, showed little planning. This penalises the student in that it becomes very hard to follow arguments when points are scattered throughout the answer. Paragraphing is always useful it shows clarity of thought and allows arguments to flow. This is important for Questions 3(a) and 3(b) where the marking is on the quality of argument, not on the number of points made.

Because marking is done on-line, it is crucial that a good quality black (not blue) pen is used and that students with poor handwriting make every attempt to help the examiner so that marks are not in danger of being lost through the inability to read what has been written. Quality of English was generally good but spelling was again, at times, very poor.

Virtually no students answered their own question rather than the one set, but far too many are still providing a two-sided response when only a one-sided one was required, or writing from the wrong point of view. Of the longer written answers, only Question 1(c) and Question 2(c) require a balanced response.

Question 1(a)(i) and (ii)

The revised format for this and Question 1(b) has made them more accessible for the majority of students. Far fewer scored zero marks than when they were asked to do a simple calculation. However, a number of students penalised themselves by writing so much that they never really reached a clear statement. Others decided to write about several trends in one response or compared trends against each other, something the question did not require. The best answers picked a clear trend, identified the start and finish figures, and the years, and did a simple addition/subtraction or percentage calculation to gain the full three marks for each of the two trends. Several, unfortunately, did not notice that the figures were in thousands. Others chose strange start and finish years and created confusion for themselves.

Reasons were better developed than in the past but there were a lot of weak responses because of an absence of knowledge and/or thought. Some good responses focused on the post-war housing boom, affluence in the 1960s/early 70s, the policies of the government in the 1980s over council house sales but, sadly, many got the years of the current economic recession quite wrong.

Question 1(b)(i) and (ii)

This was answered a lot better than Question 1(a), perhaps because the source was much more straightforward and the years were more recent. A small number did not recognise the figures as percentages and, on both this question and Question 1(a) referred to 30 houses (or 30 000 houses or houses that cost £30 000) being rented or similar. This simple misreading throws marks away. There was some clear understanding of the impact of the last few years on the ability to access homes, the role of banks, gaining a mortgage and saving up for a deposit as well as a lot of references to the current recession and student debt. The problems of miscalculation were fewer but some still tried to write combined answers to cover all three lines on the graph.

Question 1(c)

This was done quite badly. The fact that the graphs dealt with different types of tenure should have indicated to students that it was not just about getting a mortgage. There are numerous other ways of acquiring a home including shared accommodation, mobile homes, multiple occupancy and the government bringing in changes to building regulations. Perhaps it reflects our society today that home ownership has become a mantra for all.

Too many students wrote about schemes that already exist like housing associations and the 'right to buy'. A lot addressed the issue of having cheaper mortgages, reducing the size of deposits and having more flexibility in payments. There were more unusual answers that included building the house yourself, winning the lottery, evicting other people, firms providing homes for young people and paying what you feel like. Many were unrealistic but there were a few inspired suggestions. Too many thought that taking out a loan and repaying it monthly would be a good solution – a mortgage without using the word!

In answering this question, students needed some breadth of thought and the majority simply focused on buying.

Question 2(a)

This was generally well done although far too many people confused the issues of polluting emissions, the greenhouse effect and global warming with ozone-layer depletion. Students should be advised that there is a difference between the two processes and their effects.

The image was well used although, inevitably, a few thought that the steam from the cooling towers was smoke. Others depicted apocalyptic scenarios for the inhabitants of Rugeley as a consequence of living close to the power station. There were a number of strange misconceptions to this effect including deforestation, the wiping out of the entire fauna population and pandemics of respiratory diseases. Gratifyingly, the majority tackled central issues of renewability, visual pollution, emissions, transport of coal and sustainability. Acid rain and mining pollution also featured strongly with some well-developed responses.

In general, the image provided a lot of stimulation and there were very few unfocused answers.

Question 2(b)

This question also proved to be very accessible with students focusing on the benefits of nuclear energy. The better responses picked up on the phrase “new generation” and developed this point to suggest that modern nuclear technology was overcoming the safety issues and waste disposal. Inevitably there was reference to Chernobyl and Fukushima. There were frequent comparisons with fossil fuels and polluting gases. A lot of students wrote about how resources were not being used up but few identified how that protected the environment. Many students made good reference to the two images and talked about how the couple on the beach illustrated the safeness and the non-pollution of the atmosphere in terms of the proximity of the power station.

Question 2(c)

Again, in this question, there was confusion between global warming and the ozone layer. A lot of students successfully identified the two current hot topics of solar power and wind farms and discussed their strengths and limitations. A few mentioned hydro-electric power and geo-thermal energy and even fewer considered wave and tidal power, often confusing the two. Far too many offered no examples whatsoever and wrote in general terms.

Weaker answers tended to explain why coal-fired and nuclear-power stations were not acceptable and so were not focusing on what was asked. This question was an excellent opportunity for students to give specific examples but too many students avoided giving them and consequently restricted the marks they were going to gain. Those who did write well often focused on description and few discussed the issue of “effectiveness”. Consequently, there were relatively few very good answers. The most common approach to this part was to do with the vagaries of the British climate in terms of wind and sun. Sadly, a significant number mistook renewable for recycling or talked about energy saving in the home or electric cars, not realising that the electricity has to be generated somewhere.

Question 3(a)

There is still a number (but fewer than in previous years) of students who insist on arguing the opposite way to what the question asks or putting both sides into their answer. This and Question 3(b) require one-sided responses.

However, students did seem, on the whole, better prepared this time and many more used examples to support their arguments. The source was well used with students picking-up on the positives of the art to which it referred. There were some very well-used examples in particular, Lambananas and the Titanic Giants in Liverpool, The Angel of the North in Gateshead and the Orbit Tower in Stratford (East London), all of which made frequent appearances. Some useful examples referring to a student’s own area were not as evident as one might have liked or expected and would have gained credit. Banksy proved to be regular visitor to the answers and the references to Henry Moore were often good. Many recognised the benefits of street art in developing tourism, providing job opportunities and trade for local businesses, civic pride, regional history and heritage in general. The question does invite students to identify groups or individuals who might be in favour and some candidates did this very well. The majority use a vague phrase like “some people” when, with a little thought, they could have been more specific and raised their mark.

Question 3(b)

Again Banksy appeared but in this case as an alternative to buying art work and so justifying not spending money. Better students used the Source to suggest that most people either ignored the public art or were simply not interested or unaware of its existence. Weaker ones inevitably quoted it or re-wrote it in their own words. Students across the board wrote about alternative ways to spend the money and focused very much on their own priorities. The better responses tended to direct their alternatives to local issues such as their hospital, play groups, street cleaning or general refurbishment. Weaker responses referred to national priorities like defence, the NHS as a whole or the economy. Again, as in Question 3(a), a little thought could have produced a lot more specificity. “Some people” could have been “mothers with small children” (spending on a new play area) or “senior citizens” (about a library closure). There were a lot of missed opportunities.

This question was not as well done as Question 3(a). A particularly depressing feature was the number of students who did not understand the word “extravagant”.

To reiterate an earlier point on both Questions 3(a) and 3(b), it is important to remember that it is not marked in the same way as the ten-mark written answers. It is marked on both the points that are made and the quality of the arguments. Some students, possibly under instruction, identified mechanically three points and then stopped. The arguments need to be developed into a short essay of about 2 sides of writing.

On the positive side, far fewer students merely plundered the Source. Many more than in previous years used the information and/or introduced their own ideas.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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