

General Studies

Advanced GCE A2 7831

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3831

Report on the Units

June 2006

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Report on the Units taken in June 2006

Chief Examiner's Report

In 2006 there was a slight increase in the number of candidates entered for the OCR General Studies specification. Principal Examiners reported a pleasing response from candidates to the questions set. At A2 in particular, the maturity, knowledge and energy of the majority of candidates was impressive and a credit to their centres.

In their reports on the individual units, Principal Examiners have drawn attention to broad trends as well as to detailed points concerning individual questions. The following points appear as common themes across all units.

- 1 Each domain includes an area of content with which the candidates have difficulty. For example, in the Cultural Domain, the section concerned with beliefs and values is clearly very challenging for candidates. Similarly, in the Scientific Domain, candidates have problems appreciating the role of the Ozone layer in the environment. In the Social Domain, the equivalent area is that where political policies are involved. Centres may wish to revisit the ways in which they deliver these content areas.
- 2 Time management appears as an issue in several reports. Centres are reminded that the mark allocations shown on the examination paper are the best guide available to candidates. A question with a three-mark tariff usually requires the development of one key point perhaps with an example by way of support. In contrast, a question carrying 40 marks should attract an extended piece of writing. Such a piece could include introductory and concluding sections as well as three or four paragraphs where substantial points are explored, discussed and assessed. Some candidates, perhaps those with mathematics or science backgrounds, appear unfamiliar with this type of activity. So far as General Studies is concerned, the ability to communicate through an extended piece of writing is considered an important and essential skill.
- 3 A third general point involves the importance of the personal experiences of candidates. Centres must stress to candidates the value examiners place upon such experience. Frequently a key point can be developed through examples drawn from the candidate's life. Clearly there are dangers of some examples being anecdotal and of little value. However, this danger can be balanced by the richness that can be added by a well-chosen and detailed personal recollection or case study.

The attention of centres is drawn to particular and important points within individual units. These include:

- 1 The opportunity to use calculators is available in Unit 2962. Candidates are expected to have a calculator with them in the examination room.
- 2 The need to pay greater attention to the brief supplied by OCR for each of the coursework units.
- 3 The level of response expected in Unit 2968: Making Connections needs to be explained to candidates. This synoptic unit is the most challenging of all the units and carries a 40% mark weighting at A2. Examiners expect reference to be made to all three domains as well as clear evidence of the extension of points and critique of resources. Candidates demonstrating these characteristics are clearly ready to move on to further study.

2961 - The Cultural Domain (Written Examination)

General Comments

This report must begin by congratulating Centres for the progress which has been made since last year. Very few candidates did not complete the paper and virtually none misunderstood the rubric. Candidates seemed more equipped to deal with the style of the examination and tackle the different types of questions offered. In fact, it was easy to see which candidates had experienced the benefit of a properly structured and organised General Studies course by the fact that their responses extended beyond simplistic assertions supported by little factual evidence or personal engagement with the issues involved. For example, if a question asks for two reasons for something and is awarded four marks the response needs to develop further than a simple statement to access the four marks available. However, Centres should note that some candidates are still writing too much in response to questions worth few marks. As a consequence, less time was left for the answering of section B which is worth 50 marks.

The source material used for question 1 contained links to most of the answers which were required to the associated questions but in order to reach the highest marks, it was necessary for candidates to extend this material further by adding supporting statements and brief analysis. Some candidates spent far too much time on question 1 to the detriment of the rest of the examination. However, it was pleasing to note some empathy with Archbishop Tutu, Nelson Mandela, and their concerns for the world revealing some probing responses which referred to peoples' faltering sense of belief and values. Section A deliberately offered the scope for candidates to respond to material that was within their experience and to employ transferable skills in completing questions 2 and 3.

Though most candidates did finish the paper some scored far fewer marks than they could have done by spending too much time on Section A. When sufficient time was allowed for Section B there were exhilarating, refreshing, and detailed responses of an excellent standard containing personal detail and conjecture which served to intensify and develop sound arguments and conclusions. Inattention to the weighting of marks and time can cause a candidate that initially looks like heading for the highest grade to slump drastically by scoring little more than Band 4 (10 – 16 marks) for the essay in Section B.

Overall, the section of the specification related to Beliefs, Values, and Moral Reasoning seems to be an area on which Centres need to place some focus and it appears, from the experience of this paper, that candidates seem the least prepared and equipped to deal with the sometimes challenging and abstract issues associated with this subject area.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 a) It was disappointing to note that few candidates understood the word 'diminution' and that many assumed that 'powers' referred to secular or political influence. Similarly, 'oppression' proved to be a mystery to some whereas 'injustice' brought out examples of miscarriages of justice and the legal system in the UK which cause some drift from the original context. In both responses most candidates were unwilling to write more than a single point and failed to pick up the additional marks available for development and extension of ideas.
- b) The main thrust here was to understand that Heaven was likely to be a place of safety and protection away from the dangers of the Earth. The very best candidates might latch onto the concept of perfection=Heaven, imperfection=Earth. Sadly, 'accident' seemed to be seen in the context of road accidents and the descriptions of Heaven remained woolly. In contrast examiners witnessed some elegant and sensitive responses which made sound points about Tutu's own perception of Heaven.

- c)** Candidates found little trouble in responding to the idea of a ‘community’, and the concepts of living in a group, social and multicultural harmony, and a common aim were the foundations of many good answers receiving full marks. Equally, the idea of learning to be someone through the goodness and guidance of others was accessed with some ease though, in this question, candidates sometimes forgot that the constituent parts were worth three marks and that some example or development would be needed to gain the maximum.
 - d)** The responses to this part raised the question. Did the candidates know who Nelson Mandela was? The majority re-wrote the relevant extract in the source and offered no explanation. However a few were able to give extensive information, particularly in reference to the effect his release had on other people and about how Mandela inspired others, leading to him becoming the leader of his nation. It was very disappointing to note how many candidates thought that Nelson Mandela was a woman.
 - e)** The fact that this question warranted 6 marks should have implied that examiners were looking for more than the simple lifting of ideas from the text. The key issues were that Brandreth was troubled, worried, missing something in his life, and was like many other men. The important issue which triggered a high mark was Brandreth’s inability and/or reluctance to make a ‘leap of faith’. It was noted, perhaps due to an awareness of the time available, that a significant number of candidates missed this question out completely.
- 2** This question proved to be quite a good discriminator with the first quotation being the most popular one by far. Whilst a few answers to the quotations were mere paraphrase it was encouraging that some candidates extended their response by recognising the overriding power of love and charity (through the context of quotation 1) and the powers of politics (quotation 3). Interestingly, those who chose the Dickens quotation were thwarted by the idea of ‘infinitesimal’ taking it to mean unlimited!
- 3** Many candidates failed to appreciate the value of this question – 15 marks. In their haste to move on to section B, as they had spent so long on earlier questions, many answers were abridged or failed to acknowledge the audience for which the talk or discussion was intended. It was important to show a good understanding of ‘faith’ and ‘trust’ – this was missing in a number of cases. More importantly it was specifically intended to design this talk for a school or college community. Failure to do this limited marks to a mark between 7 – 10. It was useful to set out the talk in an interesting way – as a lesson plan, or as speaker’s notes. This contextualised the talk and provided a solid basis for discussion. The suggested 150 word limit was invariably exceeded at the expense of work in section B.
- 4 a)** A person’s background was often interpreted very widely to include ‘health’ or ‘interests’. The most popular responses concerned the family, religious constraints and relative income. It was important to link these ideas to why people pursued a certain leisure pursuit. Failure to do this resulted in few marks being awarded.

- 4 b)** Examiners were impressed by the range of travel experiences which candidates could cite in order to develop their answers. Indeed the efforts which many schools and colleges have made to enrich their students' life experiences is to be applauded. Candidates displayed a greater degree of tolerance towards other peoples and cultures as a result of their travel experience, discarding the stereotypical views which can result from over exposure to the media. Answers which proved to be nothing but 'holidays I have been on' or anecdotal travelogues were awarded few marks as this was not the thrust of the question. Some actually admitted that their experience of holidays in Spain and Greece, for example, did nothing to enhance their cultural experience as it was virtually the same as it was at home. The most successful answers made pointed contrasts between what they had experienced travelling compared with their experiences in the UK.
- 5 a)** This was the least popular choice in section B and the answers varied between the very good, considered analyses to the other extreme! It was surprising how little candidates could offer on the subjects of languages and cultures within the UK. Most realised that key benefits for retention would be 'good for identity' and 'tourism.' The topic of devolution and regional differences between parts of the UK seemed sadly missing from most candidates' experience judging by the poor quality of responses and the very small number of candidates choosing this question.
- 5 b)** In many cases, the last four words of the question were ignored ('on British cultural identity') and essays consisted of social and economic arguments that do not fit well in this domain. Some reasoned and informed accounts noted the rights of free passage, the breaking down of language barriers, and the promotion of more understanding between nations. At the other end of the scale, it was an opportunity to present a bigoted rant about immigration and asylum seekers 'stealing our homes and jobs'. It was also strange to see some candidates basing their answer on countries like Australia and the USA, neither of which is remotely connected to the EU. There were, however, some excellent, well-balanced essays which included reference to the dilution of our culture as against its enrichment as well as a sense of insularity in the UK as opposed to the extending of borders. Answers in this category quickly leaped into Band 1 (33 – 40 marks) for their inclusion of different kinds of knowledge (dilemmas and contradictions – assessment objective 4 - AO4).
- 6 a)** This question produced some interesting and informed answers especially on cookery. Candidates are very well aware of political issues surrounding diets and the impact that these programmes have had on people's changing lifestyles. Jamie Oliver and his School Dinner project was a popular example cited. Antiques also featured widely and there was the common thread that there were untold riches in our attics which we should now sell at a profit! This was an attractive question which candidates tackled well and managed to access the higher mark bands almost exclusively.
- 6 b)** The biggest problem that examiners faced in marking this overwhelmingly popular question was that some candidates did not understand what 'reality television' was. In fact this question represented a microcosm of the examination: some very good material, some disappointingly ill-considered material. Simply to list examples of 'reality television' did not take the candidates far but equally there were some good examples of sensitive attention to values, clearly articulated and soundly developed on reported evidence. Candidates, through their own media interest, were able to provide some insights into people's wish to become involved in this type of entertainment. Answers were thoughtful and perceptive for the most part

but there were examples which simply talked about 'the good and the bad points of Big Brother.' It is clearly the case with this question, more so than any other, that an absence of suitable examples severely hampers the overall ability of the candidate to reach the higher mark bands. Equally, to simply propound the virtues of 'reality television' would be poorly rewarded as there are clearly moral reasons why some aspects of the shows are unsuitable for a younger audience. Examiners considered this question as an excellent opportunity for candidates to discuss their own views in comparison to other groups (for example their parents). This was invariably not the case.

2962 - The Scientific Domain (Written Paper)

1 Introduction

The paper followed the usual format with sections A and B. Candidates were expected to answer all short-answer questions in Section A. In Section B there were three questions. Each question was in two parts with the first providing an introduction to the second part that involved extended writing. Candidates had to choose one question from this section.

2 General Comments

Candidates generally understood what was required in both sections of the paper. Candidates who had been well prepared for the examination, showed an awareness of the implications of the mark allocations and those who plan their extended essays carefully achieve better marks. A number of candidates forfeited part-marks by not recording their working out. Others demonstrated poor organisational skills and penalised themselves by tending to miss out parts of questions.

In Question 1 several candidates were able to achieve over 20 marks [many scored 100%] It was pleasing to note that even those candidates unwilling to tackle the calculations were still prepared to attempt the rest of the questions.

Question 2 was generally well answered, the more structured format enabling even weaker candidates to demonstrate their knowledge.

In section B question 3 was overwhelmingly popular. This was answered with varying degrees of success with the better answers addressing all aspects of the question. Answers to question 5 demonstrated knowledge and awareness of current issues. Candidates gave thoughtful and evaluative answers even if they sometimes struggled to find a variety of disadvantages. There were very few answers to question 4 and these tended to be either reasonably good or very weak.

Although time management does not seem to be a problem on this paper some candidates do not seem to appreciate that the marks available are a good indicator of the development required. In Section B too many candidates are writing long answers for part (a), worth 10 marks sometimes an A4 page and then only a few lines for the b section [40 marks].

A number of candidates are still not reading the given instructions carefully. For example there was an increase in the number of rubric infringements with candidates answering all 3 questions in Section B. This inevitably means that these answers are poorly developed. Since Section B carries 50% of the marks for the paper candidates answering all 3 questions are putting themselves at a serious disadvantage. In addition a small proportion of candidates this year did not answer all parts of question 2.

It is disappointing to note that there are still candidates arriving for this examination without a calculator. These candidates either omit the questions involving calculations altogether or spend too much time trying to complete the calculations manually with mistakes being made.

3 Individual Questions

Section A

It was pleasing to note that almost all candidates were prepared to attempt some parts of this section of the paper even if they could not manage to answer all of the questions. Candidates were able to score full marks question 1, and several did. Weaker candidates abandoned the first part of the question but were still able to score marks on the Premium Bonds question.

Candidates were expected to use a calculator for this section. Many just wrote a final figure with no indication of how they had arrived at their answer. This meant that incorrect answers were unable to score any marks for an appropriate process.

- (a) (i) Candidates were required to first of all work out that $\frac{1}{4}$ of £16000 is £4000 Then to substitute 4000 in the formula for simple interest. Candidates calculating the interest for 1 year i.e. £200 were awarded the second mark. Most candidates successfully calculated the final answer of £600. A common incorrect answer was £6 where candidates had divided the 5% by 100.
- (a) (ii) Although many candidates gave the correct answer of 20 years there were several unrealistic answers ranging from 3 months to 100 000 years. Candidates need to use common sense when reviewing their answers to ascertain whether their figures are realistic.
- (b) Candidates were required to use the formula for compound interest to work out the **amount** in the bank after 3 years. Candidates able to substitute correctly scored full marks although many did not round to the nearest pound and lost the final mark. Incorrect substitutions resulted from candidates not understanding that there was no need to divide 4% by 100. These errors produced an answer of $12000[1+0.04/100]^3$. There was often a failure to differentiate between multiplying by 3 and raising to the power of 3. Answers included £250 000 which is less than the original value, again emphasizing the need for candidates to check the size of their answers. Inevitably there were candidates who did not have a calculator and became lost in their attempted manual calculation.
- (c) There were several good answers to this question where candidates made the clear distinction between simple and compound interest, a number supporting their definitions with relevant example. There were also many who obviously had no idea that there was any difference – guesses suggested that simple interest is easier to work out, simple interest is for small amounts of money and compound interest is for large amounts of money.
- (d) It was pleasing to see how many candidates were able to work back to the original amount invested. A common error was to use the matured value as the base and then to subtract 4% of this base value from the base value.
- (e) (i) The majority of candidates gave the correct answer of 8 though some thought that you could win 7.5 prizes. However, there were candidates who did not read the question carefully enough and gave 15 as their answer or suggested that it would be impossible to say the number of prizes as the information only stipulated the number of prizes for £30 000.

- (ii) Suggestions varied but most referred to the number of bondholders and the amounts invested.
 - (iii) There was a good range of answers some quoting from the publicity material others offering personal experience and celebrity endorsement.
- (f) Answers to this question varied considerably.
Good answers referred to loss of interest, the fact that John may not win anything at all, that John may only win small prizes e.g. of £50, and that the money would depreciate over time.
Some offered a less financial analysis of John's investment dilemma e.g. his aunt's views on gambling. Others speculated whether the publicity material was truly genuine.
A number of candidates had no idea what Premium Bonds are.
Many confused them with the National Lottery, saw them as an alternative bank offering loans and interest, Others thought they were a form of 'Stocks and Shares' investment.

Question 2

The majority of candidates did well here giving good relevant examples and developing the advantages and disadvantages. This question was well answered with many candidates scoring well over 20 of the 25 marks available.

The question required an example, a developed advantage and a developed disadvantage. Responses varied substantially in length from those giving brief points to those writing a long paragraph on each part. Many candidates fell into the trap of listing two advantages and/or two disadvantages. Candidates need to be made aware that with the command word 'outline' there is an expectation of some development beyond a list. They should be encouraged to develop their points by using such words as "because", "so", "therefore" and "this means". Candidates listing two advantages with one developed and two disadvantages with one developed could still score full marks.

Although candidates only lost 1 mark for not giving an example they penalised themselves because many of the advantages and disadvantages were example specific. Where an example was not given, the marks for development could only be awarded for very general comments that applied to all possible examples.

The question requires candidates to answer all 5 parts of this question.

Unfortunately there were candidates who misread the question and gave a very full answer to just one part.

- (a) Candidates showed a good knowledge of different renewable sources of energy giving relevant advantages and disadvantages. Most common examples given were wind farms, solar power and hydroelectric power.

Some candidates failed to give an example and in these cases marks could only be awarded for very general advantages and disadvantages.
Weaker answers simply rephrased 'renewable' as an advantage. For example candidates stated that renewables can be used over and over again.

There were incorrect references to non-renewable resources e.g. coal/oil

- (b) Many candidates did well on this question although a few did write about methods of conception. The most common examples given were condoms and 'the pill'. There was obvious awareness of the fact that condoms protect against STDs and STIs but can be unreliable. Some of the disadvantages were very imaginative. It was difficult to award marks here when no example was given. Weaker answers tended to explain the meaning of contraceptive.
- (c) In this question candidates were required to identify a planet. Better candidates did name a particular mission to another planet but this was not required. Most common advantages given focused on extending our knowledge of the universe and locating more resources. The most common disadvantages were the cost, the risks and the failure of the mission. Few showed a real enthusiasm for and knowledge of space exploration. Many answers owed much to science fiction films and TV programmes.
- (d) Common responses discussed GM crops and designer babies. Good candidates gave relevant examples in agriculture of genetically modified crops and the advantages for the third world. Many made reference to Dolly the Sheep and gave the advantages and disadvantages of cloning animals e.g. for medical research. These answers were well developed and scored full marks. Too many thought IVF was an example of genetic engineering. IVF was even suggested as a contraceptive. A number of answers focussed on moral and ethical issues.
- (e) Candidates referred to a wide range of organs that can be transplanted. The most common being reference to heart, liver and kidney. Many referred to George Best [but were a bit confused as to what type of transplant he had]. There were relevant and imaginative advantages and disadvantages taking into consideration both the patient and the family. Some candidates seemed to think that pigs' organs were being routinely used in transplants these days. There were a surprising number of candidates unable to name an organ. A number of answers focussed on moral and ethical issues.

Section B

Question 3

This was the most popular question and the quality of the answers varied considerably. Candidates still seem to be unable to distinguish between the short 10 mark answer and the extended piece of writing worth 40 marks. Many wrote at great length for part (a) and then gave a short half page answer to (b). This inevitably meant that the (b) answer tended to be too short for adequate detail and development.

- (a) A small number repeated the same sport eg. swimming for the overweight person and the pregnant women but most, it is pleasing to see, did choose three different sports.
- (i) This question was generally well answered with an appropriate sport e.g. running, walking, swimming, tennis and then good development as to how this sport would benefit the overweight person with reference to the cardiovascular benefits of exercise and potential for losing weight. There were some sports that were very difficult to justify e.g. sumo wrestling. Others thought that overweight people should only play darts.

- (ii) Basketball was chosen by the majority of candidates with varying degrees of success in justifying the choice. Better answers considered the physical as well as the mental and social benefits of their choice. Many identified role models such as wheelchair athletes in the London Marathon and in the Olympics.
 - (iii) Only a very limited range of sports were on offer here. Candidates seemed to view pregnant women as very delicate creatures that had to be protected and should not be encouraged to engage in active sports. Most opted for swimming and walking as being undemanding activities which would not harm the baby. The very best candidates did realise that a woman's needs and physical abilities may change throughout the term of the pregnancy. Some think that pregnant women should only play darts.
- (b) In spite of the fact that there did not seem to be any need to define 'active sports' candidates engaged well with this question. Candidates are obviously aware of the current concerns about childhood obesity and lack of exercise and tended to focus on these issues. They expressed concern over health, weight, influence of the media, body image and the influence of celebrities and heroes.

Better answers brought out examples of sports, the needs of different age groups and then linked the two. They referred to young, middle aged and older people and linked the reasons for their involvement in suggested sports to the age group.

There were several references to the media, national sporting competitions, the World Cup and the Olympics.

Many highlighted the fact that people no longer have to put in the physical effort that was needed in previous generations, that much of our work today is sedentary and encourages lack of exercise.

There was a good range of personal experience where candidates related the issues to problems within their own families or observations in their voluntary or paid work. These showed an awareness of the needs of children and working adults as well as the retired and elderly, to socialise and keep fit.

Candidates referring to their own experiences of sporting activities and evaluating their experiences scored well in AO4.

Many confined their answer to a discussion of 'people' and 'people walking, running and cycling' in one general group. Surprisingly a significant number of responses made limited if any reference to sports and/or different age groups. It seems that the age factor was lost in the general discussion about sport and exercise. There was much general discussion about going to the gym, keeping fit and healthy, dieting but many showed little if any awareness of the changing needs of people through various stages of their lives.

Too many candidates focussed on the gym as the solution to all our problems.

Question 4

This was the least popular question and few candidates attempted it. Answers tended to be either very good or very poor.

- (a) Better candidates identified a mathematical technique, usually from the given list, and discussed its application in the three given areas.
Good answers considered for example the use of statistics in government with an analysis of the census returns helping to formulate government policy, the use of sampling methods in manufacture as part of quality control and the use of percentages to analyse farm returns and fill in tax returns
- (b) Candidates here tended to discuss why mathematics should be learnt in school, rather than later in life. But often arguments were not supported by examples of mathematical techniques, not even those used in the question. There is a tendency in this kind of question to focus on arithmetic and basic numeracy rather than looking at the wider picture and this may, to some degree, inhibit the candidate's ability to open up the answer to this question.

Question 5

This question was attempted by a significant number of candidates. There seemed to be a better understanding of the issues involved here than for the other two questions and candidates who opted for this question tended to be more successful.

- (a) Although the requirement to give three examples led candidates into a more structured answer this part of the question tended to be answered in very general terms.

Better candidates who used the very clear structure and gave three examples of why or when someone may prefer to use, or not use, the motorway were then led into an analysis and evaluation of each situation.

Many focussed on a general discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of motorways which made it more difficult to analyse and evaluate motorway travel and tended to lead to discussion of only marginal relevance.

- (b) Answers were well structured and most referred to all three of the given examples. Many were able to give a range of disadvantages for the environment although inevitably there was some overlap and some repetition.

Although the question asks for the disadvantages candidates were not penalised for attempting to offer a balance of advantages and disadvantages – only the disadvantages receiving credit.

Better answers gave the disadvantages and then went on to evaluate the suggestions and arrive at an overall conclusion. The best candidates went beyond the suggested examples and offered other possibilities which they were then able to include in their final evaluation.

The format of the question encouraged analysis and evaluation as well as allowing for personal experience and knowledge from a range of sources. Many had detailed knowledge of environmental issues relating to road transport. Candidates who referred to their own experiences e.g. of travel on Motorways [many referred to London congestion charges and travel on the M25], driving to College, received credit. The most challenging for some was to find the environmental disadvantages of railways as there has been a general tendency to consider railways only in a positive light.

2963 – The Scientific Domain (Coursework)

As was the case last year the majority of candidates seemed to home in on one of the suggested topics - in this case, obesity.

Some centres clearly give their candidates instructions to all do the same topic. They also give them the same data/websites, and the end products tended to look very similar. This of course made differentiation very difficult. In these cases while it was felt that the less able and less motivated were pushed upwards, the more able and committed may have had their style rather cramped and not received the very highest marks of which they were capable.

Almost without exception the very best tended to be those candidates who were following an individual interest. There were also some good ones where sensible adoption and development of material prepared for other subjects was made. There was a good variety of interpretations of the word "growth", but in some cases the connection seemed so limited that the tolerance of examiners was strained. Students tended to have "growth" in their title, and then find that the data they found did not have much link to it, but used it. Lots of the "obesity" coursework had plenty of information about how to solve the problem, but not much on why obesity had grown so much in recent years. There was also the tendency at times for candidates to over use their EXCEL skills, and include a huge array of data where its relevance at times was questionable. However the general feeling amongst examiners was that the quality of presentation, both written and otherwise, had improved in line with the general development of ICT skills.

Examiners would like to make the following suggestions for improvement. It is recommended that candidates are given greater scope. Examiners sensed that insisting on all candidates doing one topic does cramp the competent and more able. Centres should really make sure they are aware of the criteria which are clearly laid out in the cover sheets. A more careful study of those prior to the final writing would often improve marks substantially. If there is simply no conclusion at all, however well the other criteria are met, then marks just cannot be allocated for this heading.

Some candidates included the instructions the centre had given them and it was interesting to note that one centre that had taken care to "translate" those criteria into something the students could grasp easily when doing the final draft, in checklist form. It included mark-gaining headings such as "Is there a bibliography?" "Is there an obvious conclusion?". Candidates from that centre did well- and they clearly had a very mixed ability group.

2964 – The Social Domain 1

The examination paper for June 2006 followed a similar format to that of previous years with Section A linked to stimulus material and Section B providing three questions from which the candidates had to select one. Examiners reported that the great majority of candidates responded positively to the question paper with many showing great motivation and energy.

Examiners were agreed on a number of trends that were apparent in the scripts they read. The following five positive features were the most widespread.

- 1 Candidates from centres where a programme of preparation had been provided outscored those with little or no preparation.
- 2 In this sitting of the examination more candidates showed an ability to demonstrate thinking and analytical skills.
- 3 The spelling, punctuation and grammar in the scripts presented to examiners were, in general, of a higher standard than in previous years. This trend applied particularly to the use of a wider vocabulary, less intrusion of slang expression and the ability to provide a concluding paragraph where it was required. Words regularly spelt incorrectly included weather and whether, their and there and principal with principle.
- 4 A number of candidates showed a good knowledge base in terms of current and recent political policy in the UK. Clearly candidates were familiar with the names and contributions of the main political players in the years from 1980 to 2006.
- 5 Candidates had clearly been well prepared in terms of the questions set for this paper. In several questions a clear structure was provided and candidates followed it successfully.

Examiners noted a number of concerns that centres may wish to take into account in their planning of future programmes. These concerns were linked to the length of the piece of extended writing in Section B, the scope of candidate experience and the grasp that the candidates have of the power of the government in the UK.

In terms of the length of the extended writing question in Section B centres are reminded of the 40% mark weighting of this piece. Too often examiners read a six line paragraph that carried 3 marks and then a 12 line paragraph for which up to 40 marks could be awarded. Whilst the length of a piece of extended writing is not a definitive guide to its content and quality there is a need to develop these 40 mark answers.

This sitting of the paper revealed that candidates carry a very short time span in terms of experience. The greater majority had little feel for the 1945 post war reconstruction of the UK. Whilst it would not be expected that candidates would have a detailed knowledge of this period sixty years ago it is suggested that some familiarity might be expected. So many of the features of life in the UK today found their genesis in the five years after 1945.

Many candidates appear to believe that the government of the UK is all powerful. For example in one of the questions the candidates had to suggest ways of making housing more affordable and available. Too many suggested that the government should stop house price rises by order. Clearly they need a clearer view of the scope and power of government.

Individual questions

- 1 In this question the candidates had to explain the meaning of five words or pairs of words used in the two resources that were provided.

In general the candidates did well in this section. Particularly pleasing was their understanding of the word 'Invest'. They also used their own experience to good effect to show understanding of the terms 'basic skills' and 'minimum wage'. Answers showing understanding of the term 'Public ownership' were disappointing.

- 2 This proved the most difficult part of the examination paper for most candidates.
- (a) Candidates had to make five comparisons between the statements in the 1945 Manifesto and the Briefing Document for 2004. Unfortunately a lack of understanding of the context of 1945 meant that some of these comparisons were not strong.
- (b) In the two questions in this section the candidates had to identify people who might disagree with the statements in the 1945 and 2004 documents. Some found exercising the skill of finding reasons for disagreement quite challenging.

The most frequently chosen statement from the 1945 document was 'Economic and price controls so that every citizen gets fair play, including homes for all before luxuries for the few'. The most usual reason for disagreement was that hard work deserves its rewards. Those who have worked hard should have their luxuries. In contrast those who had not worked so hard did not deserve their luxuries.

From the 2004 statements the most disagreed with one was 'Raise the minimum wage to £4.20'. Candidates often felt that this would be disagreed with as being too little or that small businesses would find it too great a financial burden.

It is perhaps surprising to note that some candidates thought the phrase 'tax cuts' meant a reduction in benefit.

Centres may find it helpful to note that there were ten marks available in these sections. This suggests that quite developed pieces, rather than a few lines, were expected.

- 3 (a) In this question candidates had to find three justifications for the differences in pay of a petrol pump attendant and an international entertainer. The international entertainer was usually interpreted as someone appearing on stage at a concert. Many candidates were able to give three reasons. The most frequent problem was that candidates did not link their reason to both the cashier and the entertainer. For example the candidate might say that the cashier had a relatively low skill level but then offer no comparison concerning the skills of the entertainer.

A small number of candidates suggested ways of redressing the imbalance rather than justifying the differential.

- (b) Candidates showed a good understanding of this question and many explained why money can motivate in some circumstances. On the other hand they recognised the use of other strategies to lift the workforce and make it more effective and efficient. In some cases the candidates presented a barrage of alternatives to increased pay. Possibly the most difficult to articulate was the negative effects of increased pay.

A particularly pleasing feature of some answers was the use of theory, usually with the name of its key proponent attached. These answers tended to develop a critical depth that was well rewarded.

Clearly the work experience of candidates as well as the part-time jobs they undertake gave them valuable background information.

- 4 (a) Most candidates were able to offer some understanding of both of the quotations offered. Only the very best candidates were able to give any ideological underpinning to either statement.

Some centres had clearly given instruction on the different types of democracy and candidates from these centres used the information effectively.

One danger to be avoided is the repetition of the phrase without any additional explanation.

- (b) This was a generally popular question with candidates giving advantages and disadvantages. Better candidates attempted some assessment of the relative balance of the two positions.

A number of candidates confused a referendum with a general election.

- 5 (a) Most candidates were able to suggest four ways in which more affordable housing could be provided. The greatest concern of examiners was with the apparent confusion in the minds of candidates as to the power of the government. Too often candidates appeared to think that the government could fix house prices at whatever level they chose.

Some candidates confused demand and supply. They tended to focus on ways to reduce demand rather than increase supply.

- (b) Most candidates were able to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the continued trend of house price rises. Some of the thinking was a little simplistic. Candidates suggested that increased prices gave greater profit without mentioning subsequent purchases.

From some centres there were perceptive comments about differences in house prices between the regions. These were not easily fixed within the context of the question but were clearly on the minds of candidates.

2965 – The Scientific and Cultural Domains

The paper followed a similar format to that used in previous years. Candidates were required to answer one question from a choice of three in the Science Domain and one from three in the Cultural Domain.

It was clear that of the six questions set only number three did not provide an interesting challenge to candidates. All of the other questions proved popular with many answers provided.

The following five points were frequently mentioned by examiners as common strengths.

- 1 The answers provided were well structured. For example if asked for an assessment of advantages and disadvantages the good essay would have an introduction, sections on advantages and disadvantages, an assessment of the two and then a conclusion.
- 2 Answers were developed using examples and useful personal experience. For example when discussing the advantages of Identity Cards a good paragraph would establish an advantage, set it into the context of contemporary life in the UK and then provide some local experience.
- 3 A number of the questions provided a clear point of focus with boundaries well established. For example question two required consideration of the advantages of four type of waste management. The greater majority of candidates resisted the temptation to provide disadvantages but instead used them to establish some assessment of each method.
- 4 The Section B questions tended to be less structured. It is pleasing to note the way in which many candidates then established their own structure for their response. For example in question four they describe three or four ways in which nationalism is encouraged in the UK today. They then began new paragraphs showing the ways in which nationalism could and cannot replace religion in everyday life. Some of these clearly structured responses showed great maturity and insight.
- 5 In general examiners commented that spelling, punctuation and grammar appeared to have improved.

As well as these positive features the examining team noted a number of areas where centres might wish to review their teaching programme. The three main areas identified were linked to the use of specific examples in the Science Domain answers, the tenets underpinning particular religions and the need to illustrate answers in the Cultural Domain through the use of personal experience.

Comments on individual questions

- 1 This question required the candidates to make an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages possible through the introduction of identity cards in the UK.

The question was, in general, well answered with many candidates gaining high marks. Band 1 and 2 answers tended to be those that, as well as developing sets of advantages and disadvantages, also included an element of assessment. This was usually presented as a concluding section to the essay. However some exceptionally good answers sustained the assessment throughout as the candidate analysed individual points. This required a high degree of skill and energy.

A small number of answers, when considering the role of identity cards and national security contained a number of unpleasant comments on illegal in-migrants. These answers tended to confuse refugees with the illegal immigrants

Some candidates did tend to exaggerate the facilities being planned for these cards. The information appeared to be endless and included criminal records, speeding fines, bank statements, DNA, iris recognition and immigration status. Many wondered what would happen to passports and appeared to expect the whole world to follow this UK initiative.

In general, though the disadvantages were more developed and assessed most candidates came down in favour of these cards. The compulsory nature of them, their costs and the feasibility of production and constant updating were major themes. Many candidates appeared to have little confidence that the authorities could deliver the package. The government, the civil service and 'them' were all conflated as an inefficient and hidden crowd.

- 2 There were many good answers to this question. Candidates were asked to examine and assess the advantages of four strategies for waste management.

Of the four strategies the one concerned with Recycling produced the best answers. In contrast the strategy to Reduce waste produced relative poor answers. The advantages given for Landfill and Incineration tended to be rather limited.

Some candidates used their time unwisely and produced long paragraphs explaining the methods used in the strategies.

The most critical point that was raised by examiners concerning these essays was the introduction of disadvantages by the candidates. The question required only the advantages of the four strategies. When the question was set it was felt that, in the time available only a full treatment of the advantages was possible. As a result much of the material presented as disadvantages could not be allowed. However some candidates did use this material quite skilfully to assess the advantages of the strategy.

3 This was the least popular question on the paper.

Quite a number of candidates failed to understand the meaning of the phrase 'Charity begins at home'.

In contrast there were some excellent answers with strong sections debating the moral dilemmas facing countries when humanitarian and political positions are in contradiction

A number of candidates limited their answers to the circumstances found in less economically developed countries. They appeared to suggest that disasters never happen in more economically developed countries.

Some candidates gave very full accounts of the tsunami that hit countries in SE Asia and other developed case studies around the floods in New Orleans. Many found it difficult to link 'Charity begins at home' to the response of the government of the United States. This may be because they did not understand the federal system of government in the United States and imposed a UK type of response upon it. There were very few case studies or references to the UK.

Centres may wish to consider activities where candidates explore the several possible meanings of a saying, phrase or quotations. Where ambiguity does exist it is acceptable for the candidates to recognise the several meanings and to state clearly the interpretation they are going to follow.

4 The question could be viewed as having three parts. In the first the candidates were expected to identify the ways in which nationalism is encouraged in the UK. In the second they then had to establish the extent to which nationalism can be a replacement for religion in everyday life. Finally there was a need to recognise areas of life where nationalism is not a substitute for religion. It was in this third task that many candidates had little to offer. This may reflect the dominance of secular thinking in everyday life in the UK. The better answers noted the roles of religions that cannot be replaced by nationalism in such as areas as the existence of a supreme being, the forgiveness of sin and the meaning of life after death.

Weaker candidates tended to concentrate on the ways in which nationalism is encouraged with little mention of the religious dimension in the question.

5 This was not a popular question.

The main strength of the answers was shown in the ways in which motivation takes place. For example some candidates used their psychology or management studies to describe hierarchies of motivation needs. Candidates were less successful in developing their answers from motivational forces into innovation and creativity.

A number of candidates used their personal experience to good effect. Schools and teachers gained a positive press with many candidates writing of the seminal influence a particular member of staff had for them

- 6 This was probably the most popular question on the paper with some very good responses. In the question candidates had to select two groups of creative activity and explain how they contribute to our appreciation of the more pleasant aspects of life such as happiness, love, beauty and friendship.

Fashion, painting, photography, music and the screen were all areas that were chosen regularly.

A large number of candidates selected fashion but few produced good answers. Most suggested that selecting clothes and shopping produced happiness. Thinking was dominated by the reasons for the clothes we wear such as 'to reveal our personality' or 'to make sure we fit into the group' but did not then link these ideas to happiness, love, beauty and friendship.

Whilst painting was a popular choice the interpretation tended to be in terms of narrative works. Rural scenes were identified as showing beauty. Few mentioned portraits or more abstract works. Little was included on the role of colour, light and shade or symbolism.

In the answers where photography was chosen the idea of frozen images of pleasant memories dominated. The idea of composition appeared lost on many candidates.

Music was a popular choice and rather surprisingly many included named pieces of music that concentrated on the less pleasant aspects of life. Few mentioned the use of the major key in relation to 'happier' moments. Very few mentioned tempo or rhythm. Some very good answers mentioned light melody lines as opposed to heavy chords, broken chords or syncopation. Instead answers included the favourite song of couples or the music played at weddings. So much more could have been made of the use of the lyrics of musicals.

Many of the answers could have so easily been strengthened through the use of examples or of personal experience.

In the specification it is required that candidates study two of the areas listed. Examiners suggest that centres consider including biographical sections on two well known artists so that deeper understanding of their works is achieved. This may avoid the very general answers that some candidates produced.

2966 - The Social Domain

General Comments

The paper differentiated well across a very wide range of ability; the full range of marks (0-100) was used. The majority of candidates seem engaged, even enthused, by the paper and examiners were able to comment on a significant number of lively and intelligent scripts. Candidates did best when they had a thorough grasp of, and a definite view on, the subjects under discussion and answered the question that was posed, not a similar or related question for which they had prepared and/or found more congenial. Candidates who had not been taught by their centres were particularly prone to answering the question they would have preferred to have been asked.

As far as technical matters are concerned, little has changed from previous years. Spelling (e.g. their, there, they're) and punctuation (the 'grocer's' apostrophe in particular) was often poor, paragraphing was variable, and handwriting, even when not quite illegible, was often appalling. It is pleasing to report as well that many candidates in the upper bands wrote competent, literate, occasionally pungent and sometimes elegant scripts which were a pleasure to read.

Section A

A very large proportion of candidates began their essays by saying that the form of protest described was both an attack on democracy and part of the democratic process - a hedging of bets perhaps reminiscent of political discourse in general. It is, of course, entirely admirable to write something that attempts to strike a balance between two opposing ideas in a question but in this case, it was not at all an easy thing to argue and many candidates produced writing that was meandering and inconclusive as a result. Candidates should realise that they will not necessarily be penalised for taking a one sided view of a situation, if what they write is convincing, and in this case it might have encouraged more rigorous structuring of essays.

This having been said, there was also a significant number of candidates who did not concentrate sufficiently on the effect of protest as a democratic or anti-democratic process but who took the opportunity to discuss the pros or cons of fox hunting or the probity or otherwise of the present Government.

Other candidates took an overly historical approach and drew analogies that were less than convincing: could the suffragettes be said to be attacking true democracy; was the plight of blacks in 1950s/1960s America be on a par with those denied the right to hunt? One was sometimes left with the impression that candidates were possessed of such information which they wished to use, and took the opportunity to decant it into an answer where it might not necessarily belong.

Section B

Question 2

This question was, in the main, well answered by candidates who had a clear definition of positive discrimination. It is emphatically not, as many candidates seemed to think, giving jobs to inferior, unqualified applicants from ethnic minorities. However, even those whose grasp of the term was somewhat tenuous managed to make some valid points.

Many candidates contended themselves with saying (at lesser or greater length) that all discrimination is wrong, full stop. This is certainly true on one level but hardly acknowledges the practical complexities, or gives the impression that they knew sufficient about the topic to be able to discuss it intelligently.

A small number of the better respondents used their own work-experience to inform balanced and well organised answers.

There was a small number of unpleasantly racist responses.

Question 3

Most candidates grasped some of the main points here: the obese, alcoholics and heavy smokers are tax paying human beings who possess the right to treatment. That perhaps they might be said to inflict their woes on themselves should not mean that they forfeited some or all of this right - or perhaps it should? Better public awareness of health issues was often highlighted. Most candidates who answered this question suggested some sort of compromise, which was admirable in some ways, but more interesting answers often took a more extreme view: e.g., times have changed and the NHS must change with them.

Some candidates also wrote knowledgably about preventive medicine in relation to these "self-inflicted" illnesses. Others pointed out how difficult the process of triage would be for patients in these categories, often citing the late George Best as a pertinent example.

Question 4

Answers to this question were often disappointing. They were general in content, and bland in tone. Some candidates merely connected 'home' with 'family values' and lamented the state of the nation's morals. An opportunity for personal response and reflection was thus missed.

Weaker candidates produced work which verged on the mawkish: that 'a house is not a home' may be a truism, but it is hard to see where it fits in to an A level General Studies essay - at least when it is, apparently, seriously meant.

Some - a few - better candidates wrote thoughtful (often personal) reflections on the concept of home from the familial, societal and national perspectives, and these responses were often the most engaging and readable scripts in the entire cohort.

2967 – The Social Domain 2

Coursework

There was no overall difference on last year's performance. Candidates clearly felt comfortable with the brief. They had a lot to write about both criminal behaviour and anti-social behaviour. Some tried to merge the two together and not really see the difference between them.

The organization of studies tended to be very sound and it was good to see a range of source material used. There was a fairly wide range of topics chosen, although binge drinking seemed to be the most popular. Without exception 'visible' crime /bad behaviour like speeding and street hate crime were chosen, and there was no sign of any thinking about white collar or hi-tech crime. Most candidates had no problems with part (a) of the brief, but a lot ignored (b) totally. Examiners were surprised that the generation allegedly most involved in the binge drinking could not think about the causes of it. Examiners tended to read generalizations such as "everyone does it". Candidates who tried to link the two parts of (b) of the Brief tended to be those who did very well indeed. Many ignored the "ideologies and values" part of the overall brief, but again those who tackled it tended to get very high marks. At times able candidates did not seem to be really aware of the criteria. The folder in which the work is submitted makes it very clear how those who mark it can allocate marks, and candidates really need to be more aware of these criteria. The centres that obviously briefed candidates on the criteria tended to do very well.

The best answers tended to stay closely to the brief and come from centres which did not dictate too closely the content and the topic chosen. These candidates tended to discuss their findings and give their own views on them. They did not just repeat downloaded statistical data, but select it carefully and commented on it in an intelligent, critical way. Information was just not taken at face value. If there was clear evidence that candidates had talked about options, discussed the relevance of statistical data, considered factual evidence and made some comparisons, then they could easily score high marks for criteria 4, 5 and 6.

Some graphs and diagrams were originally coloured, but black and white versions were submitted, which were often impossible to read clearly. The other major failing was ignoring local area issues, and just doing something "national".

Examiners suggest that there are a number of ways to improve candidate submissions. For example centres should ensure candidates are aware of the marking criteria, keep to the broad themes and keep to the assignment brief. More critical evaluation of the data would also help and candidates should not download facts and diagrams uncritically.

2968 - Making Connections (Written Examination)

General Comments

The examination presented candidates with a variety of source material supporting two entirely different questions. In the case of question 1, candidates were asked to look at issues and developments relating to the rapid expansion and changing modes of transport using an annotated map, a graph, a time-line, and statistics. Though question 2 was more abstract in content, examining how scientists have affected people's belief in a god, there was still a wealth of information available as the foundation for a thoughtful and considered response.

What seems to have been ignored by candidates, in many cases, is some consideration of the *level* of this examination. The unit is valued at 40% of A2 (20% of the full A level) and, as such, examiners are looking for standards of essay construction, argument, and analysis which match an advanced level of study. After all, the level of achievement reached in the examination is, in many cases, the prelude to study in Higher Education and as such, there must be evidence of planning, mature consideration of possibilities and extension of existing ideas. It is an ill-conceived plan that relies on simply 'lifting', 'padding' or a précis of the sources: this results in work of a much lower level than expected – essays that would sit securely in Band 4 (11-20 marks).

Many candidates relied exclusively on the sources and failed to extend their answers much beyond their content despite the fact that transport was a subject with which most if not all had some personal experience. Bald statements and assertive paragraphs were commonplace whereas it would have been so easy to argue from personal experience or challenge the progress that was apparently being made in the world of transport.

On the other hand, examiners did read some quite enlightened answers to question 2 despite the fact that others revealed a distinct lack of patience and interest in the whole concept of beliefs and values. The most important issue to raise is that of careful reading of the question. Question 2 was concerned with how the findings and beliefs of scientists have effected people's belief in God not simply how people's belief in God has become more questionable. This subtle change of emphasis resulted in essays with a potential of Bands 1 and 2 straying no further than the middle of Band 3 (21-30),

Planning was evident though the layout of the sources in question 1 acted as a pseudo-plan, some candidates painstakingly working through each part and thereby spending far too long on this question. In a number of essays, the writing was considered, fluent, and showed a respect for the source material and its implications. In the higher Bands, candidates exuded knowledge with panache and were able to examine, question and dissect the whole ethos and moral acceptability of transport expansion whilst at the same time, in question 2, show equal respect for the work and values of scientists and theologians. It is so important when planning General Studies courses to allow for the exploration of extremes of opinion even when it is necessary to construct scenarios for the same. Where students' preparation for the examination has consisted of the absorption of facts on related topics from the domains, the result will be ill-prepared essays of marginally relevant material. The development and pursuit of an argument or viewpoint is so important and integral to reaching Band 1 in this paper. Equally, essay writing practice is not only desirable but indispensable and must be an important element in A2 study.

There was evidence of good reference to the three domains, even when one of the three may have remained implicit in the answer. It is so important *to make connections* and draw upon the experience gained through examining the important elements of the three key domains: this is paramount to any success and the heart of the examination. Essays invariably had some sort of structure to them. There was usually an attempt at an introduction that at best warmed the

audience as to what might follow and at worst was a repetition of the title; many essays lead to a conclusion which at worst was a restatement of the title and at best (and most desirably) a speculation, a challenge or a personal preference. The latter option lead to the unlocking of valuable Assessment Objective 4 marks for the inclusion of other types of knowledge.

Time management seemed good in most cases but there was a tendency to spend a little longer on question 1 since this appeared to be a topic with which most candidates had more to write. This may have been because there was more than one source. However, Centres are reminded that candidates should divide their time equally between the two questions, spending 45 minutes on each essay. The quality of English was satisfactory and there were few examples of poorly presented or badly written scripts. The overall standard of spelling, punctuation, grammar and syntax remains disappointing.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 The question was concerned with the implications arising from the rapid expansion and changing modes of transport in the UK. It was judged that this topic was within the experience of most candidates and that it may be possible to access Bands 1 and middle Band 2 (a mark of between 35 – 50) by explaining how people's lives had changed in both a positive and negative respect and perhaps to extend these ideas further with some contradiction or questioning of the UK's infrastructure. It would have been desirable to use personal experience or comments on, for example, how changes had affected the candidate, the family, movement to and from school, social interaction, holidaying, urban and rural areas, to name but a few of the possible avenues which the discerning writer may have explored.

In reality, there was too much reliance on the source material and blatant copying of ideas without any interpretation and extension. This seemed the easy way out and revealed the lack of a scholarly approach and any structured preparation for an essay-based examination. A potted-history of transport was not appropriate; a consideration of effects was needed as well as an analysis of where transport is today and the way forwards. This shortcoming revealed a distinct lack of experience in dealing with any numerical or statistical data; this must feature as a highlight of this report. In the case of source 2, lengthy repetition or paraphrasing is not enough to reach the higher mark Bands. The information should be used as a starting point from which the essay may germinate and flower, where candidates question the validity of the data, the reliability of the sources and the whole focus of the question.

In this connection, another issue worthy of mentioning is over-simplification. For example: 'A growth in the number of children travelling to school by car is the main cause of childhood obesity.' True, this may be a factor but it is only one cause. Similarly, candidates who suggested that the increase in car transport to school was due to paedophilia were equally short-sighted and apparently clutching at straws in order to eke out a tangible response.

Many candidates evaluated a full range of transport options but did so from an entirely positive or entirely negative perspective thereby providing an unbalanced response which may well have been avoided with more attention paid to examination technique and essay writing. Naturally a significant proportion veered from one side to the other tending either to empathise with the environmental and health concerns or the social and cultural benefits. The result was a superficial essay and sadly, examiners saw many of these during this session. Indeed, Global Warming and the Greenhouse Effect are not the sole effects of transport expansion but could, and were used to great effect as a springboard into discussing the scientific and environmental issues which concern everyone.

Local and regional examples clearly strengthened answers such as the effects that the expansion of Stansted and Liverpool Airports have had on the local economy but at the same time have had a detrimental effect on the environment. There were also valid references to the M6 Toll, the London Congestion Charge, the poor quality of Britain's rail system compared to our European neighbours, and the Manchester and Sheffield Trams. Whether the candidates had a deeper knowledge of these developments was not an issue; for the purpose of this paper they were demonstrating their ability to put the question into a wider context and were therefore demonstrating their lateral thinking skills and ability to make connections.

- 2 Responses to Question 2 were what might be described as 'a famine or a feast.' On the one hand the best answers, clearly discussed what was asked for: the extent to which the findings and beliefs of scientists have affected people's belief in God. In producing an effective and balanced response, candidates showed an understanding of the extent and limitations of the author's views and explored some of the commonly held viewpoints saving their own for the conclusion. Popular areas to visit were miracles and acts of God, the decreasing interest in religion throughout the Western world, and the Evolution and 'Big Bang' theories. This open-ended question offered a table to serve a sumptuous feast of argument and questioning on one of the world's most perplexing issues which has formed the basis of many stimulating articles, books, television documentaries and films. With balanced, rational and sensitive examination of the topic many erudite and articulate candidates achieved a mark high in Band 1 (41 – 50 marks).

However, poor responses left examiners looking for scraps and crumbs as candidates failed to engage with the subject matter and seemingly rewrote the question to one which examined whether it was right to believe in God and whether God existed or not. In such cases, examiners found it difficult to award marks above Band 3 (21 – 30 marks) as essays showed a marked insularity about religion by perhaps suggesting that 'religion is dying' because 'no one goes to church anymore.'

Many candidates did not seem to understand that most Christians are not spiritually affected by evolution theory. In fact, the best responses seen hit upon the idea that what happened at Lourdes or whether there was or was not a 'Big Bang' is of little significance to a true believer in God because true belief was a matter of God being within us or in our minds and not a question of some presence or influence over great events or discoveries. These were the very able candidates who prepared a response using some of the more sophisticated elements of religious philosophy.

It was evident that a notable majority addressed their remarks to the Christian God and that other faiths believed in a different god and therefore different rules might apply. This was disappointing and leads to the suggestion that General Studies courses should remain ecumenical and involve the study of other religions in the coverage of the specification in order to promote a more balanced and full response when dealing with a question such as this.

Finally, examiners have noted, yet again, a distinct lack of attention to the general standard of English grammar and syntax. This is particularly dismaying when candidates fail to spell words that are used in the sources and that are integral to their response. It is quite evident that more candidates performed better on question 1 than on question 2 probably because the topic was closer to their own lives, partly because the connection between the sources and the task was more patent and partly because the second question required more abstract thought and made greater demands on the candidates' use of English.

It is clear that essay construction and presentation are key issues for consideration when preparing candidates for future sessions of this and other A level examinations.

**Advanced GCE General Studies 7831/3831
June 2006 Assessment Series**

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2961	Raw	100	67	60	53	47	41	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2962	Raw	100	69	62	55	49	43	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2963	Raw	100	70	62	55	48	41	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2964	Raw	100	64	56	48	41	34	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2965	Raw	100	75	68	61	54	48	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2966	Raw	100	69	61	54	47	40	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2967	Raw	100	69	62	56	50	44	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2968	Raw	100	67	61	56	51	46	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
3831	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7831	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3831	7.8	21.9	42.5	65.0	83.0	100	25450
7831	9.6	26.7	50.9	75.8	92.7	100	15475

40925 candidates aggregated this session

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see;
www.ocr.org.uk/OCR/WebSite/docroot/understand/ums.jsp

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

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