

# General Studies

Advanced GCE A2 7831

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3831

## Report on the Units

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Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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## **Chief Examiner's introduction**

Once again the entry for this specification has increased. Examiners are pleased to welcome a number of sixth form colleges who have submitted candidates for the first time this year.

The Principal Examiner reports on individual units that follow this introduction include a number of common features and these have been drawn together in this introduction.

The common features that appear several times in the individual units can be summarised under the following seven headings.

1. Two of the papers explore the cultural domain. Candidates clearly had some difficulty with their concept of culture and centres are encouraged to explore its definitions. The General Studies specification is helpful in this respect. In their responses candidates appear to believe that cultural groups are synonymous with minority groups. A number of internet web sites have assembled definitions of culture and these would be worth using as the basis of a handout for candidates.
2. A number of candidates appeared to spend an excessive amount of time on questions in the earlier parts of the paper that carry few marks. Centres are reminded that the number of marks available for each question is given on the examination paper. These are a useful guide as to the amount of time that should be devoted to an answer. The use of past mark schemes would also be beneficial in this respect. Some centres use past papers and mark schemes with candidates in their preparation for the examination. This helps candidates to manage their time in a more effective way.
3. All questions contain command words such as describe, explain, suggest reasons for and discuss. In this examination it was noted that the easier task of describing a situation tended to overwhelm more complex tasks such as 'account for' or 'explain'. As a result the candidates took too long on the descriptive part of the question. Candidates need to recognise that marks are allocated for all parts of the question. Whilst good marks can be obtained for a strong performance, in say the descriptive part of the question, they will be lost if part of the question is not answered.
4. Examiners report a general feeling that the quality of spelling, the use of punctuation and correct grammar improved this year. However centres are encouraged to give their candidates more experience in articulating some of the more complex points needed for high marks. Too often examiners felt that a candidate had recalled a concept or argument that they wished to use but could not articulate the complex message they had in mind. As a consequence scripts revealed minds struggling to get across some of the more complex messages.

This situation could be improved if candidates were given more opportunities to develop controlled arguments during their programmes of study. Alternatively candidates could be invited to read arguments presented by skilled authors. The broadsheet press or the weekly and monthly periodicals would provide a ready source for such writing.

5. Some questions establish very clear boundaries within which the candidate is expected to operate. Other questions are more open-ended and allow candidates to establish their own territory. For example questions in the Science Domain papers are usually circumscribed. In the Cultural Domain there is usually greater freedom. However there is no certainty of this division. Centres are encouraged to explore with candidates the anatomy of questions in order to establish whether clear boundaries are included.

6. A majority of essay questions provided an open-ended incline of difficulty. For less gifted candidates these questions can be answered through underdeveloped list. However the questions also provide opportunities for more able candidates to introduce additional and more complex points, for example the role of ideology in conditioning the orientation of a response. In some cases there is a danger that able candidates take the apparently simple route and fail to explore the topic in depth. Centres should encourage candidates to search for more complex perspectives. These may be found in historical or political perspectives, the use of ideology, the provenance of information and ideas and the existence of dilemmas or paradoxes.
7. Centres are reminded of the need for candidates to be critical of some sources of information taken from the internet. This is a difficult task for the inexperienced and more practice is recommended.

In conclusion the Principal Examiners report, having received comments from their assistant examiners, the pleasure that many had when reading a large number of the essays. The candidates did, in general, demonstrate well informed opinions which they expressed with great energy. They had clearly been well educated by their centres.

## **2961: The Cultural Domain (Written Examination)**

### **General Comments**

Session after session there is increased evidence of candidates and their teachers becoming more familiar and comfortable with the design of the AS paper and its demands. Very few candidates failed to complete the paper and virtually none failed to misunderstand the rubric. There was, however, a marked improvement in the answers to Section A, as candidates had been more carefully prepared for questions that required a structured response. These were sometimes extended beyond simplistic assertions and amply supported by evidence and examples. For example, this enabled candidates who were answering a question asking for two features the opportunity to score more than a basic two marks for two points by developing their answer further than a simple statement. Centres have noted previous advice about writing too much in response to questions that were worth few marks. As a consequence, there was evidence of longer answers in Section B.

The theme of Section A was radio and it soon became clear that this was an unpopular media for many young people. Some responded imaginatively and enthusiastically to the opportunity to air a current issue in the form of a radio broadcast in question 3. It is possible that poor time management may have affected some of the answers to Section B but more commonly it was the plain, perennial problem of not answering the question which had been set. For example, in question 6b candidates are asked to 'identify and briefly describe...' In so many cases, what amounts to the introduction to an essay on effects on public opinion turned out to be the main body of the essay and as a result candidates found themselves barely moving out of Band 4 (9 – 16 marks). Centres are strongly advised to consider carefully and practise planning the nature and body of an answer by ensuring that the components of a question are covered in a reasonably balanced way.

Question 4 was linked to Beliefs, Values, and Moral Reasoning and it was very pleasing to note a marked improvement in the quality of answers in this area, not just for their content but also in the candidates' ability to argue reason and exemplify. It appears that candidates solely relate the idea of minority groups (as indicated in Question 5) to matters of race and colour whereas the specification offers many more examples that could be cited and developed.

Time management now seems to be the province of the disinterested and disaffected which, examiners have remarked, is getting to be fewer and fewer candidates each year. Candidates appear better prepared and able to tackle the serious matter of completing an examination that is not just a measure of the academic ability but also of their skills in selection, argument, persuasion and evaluation.

### **Comments on Individual Questions**

- 1a) These short responses serve as an introduction to the paper and most candidates fared well. There was sometimes a failure to pick up the second mark by adding a distinct supporting comment. In part ii) 'eye-watering' was sometimes interpreted as mouth-watering and therefore the intrinsic meaning shifting from one of a negative to a positive. In part iii) 'audio-buffs' was not generally known, though in some cases it was thought of as meaning 'your Dad' in a semi-derogatory way. Candidates were able to score marks by explaining the phrase as it was used in the passage as well as offering a different, and sometimes original, interpretation.

- b) This question elicited some common responses. Some tautologous answers materialised mentioning the increased profits which might be gained by advertisers but more commonly the idea of segregating the market into lots of different sections (through specialised radio broadcasts) seemed to be the most appealing outcome. This question clearly demanded a little more thought and candidates became unduly confused between the pros and cons of advertising rather than how the proliferation of radio stations might help its development.
- 2a) This question was poorly answered largely due to the overall inability to understand what is meant by a cultural feature; as a consequence, most candidates scored about half marks for a reasonably concise and accurate description of the two images. Of these, those that chose an ethnic view and stance made some progress at unravelling the underlying message. There was considerable disagreement about the social status of the children in source 1: some saw them as poor, because of their clothing, but failed to recognise the historical context of the image, whereas other saw them as affluent because they did recognise the context and realised that this was how middle class children would have dressed. What was clearly absent was any real attempt to uncover the underlying cultural traits through things such as group and personal listening, conforming to fashion as opposed to making a personal 'statement.' The radio in source 1 is clearly a source of entertainment and education, whereas source 2 is more representative of the culture of the individual.
- b) This question promoted some confident and very well versed responses from candidates living in an age of ever changing and varied media. It was disappointing to see so many candidates seeing radio as a weak media source when set against television, and particularly satellite broadcasting. It is pertinent to note that in studying the latest developments in media and communications for this Unit, Centres would be wise to place current innovations in an historical context. This would allow the candidates to observe and comment on the nature and rate of change. In summary, answers depended on the notions of variety, ease of access, interactivity and sensory development to score a good number of marks.

3

Once again, examiners reported the poor time management of many candidates in this question worth 25 marks but only forming part of Section A. Unless specifically mentioned in the rubric, candidates do not have to write in continuous prose. Questions such as this could appear in tabular form or as bullet points **as long as these are developed and explained.** The question proved a very good discriminator as most benefited from the structure provided and were thus able to access the upper mark bands with ease. The most common issues tackled were: binge drinking, stereotyping in young people, smoking in public places, teenage sex and pregnancy, the EMA, the cost of insurance for young drivers, and the overload of examinations for students in the English system. Many of the issues were focused in a negative way and therefore there was imbalance in the number points on either side of the argument. Some of the representatives cited were real people, others remained anonymous but symbolic of a group or point of view. Sadly, the last part of the question was least well done but was perhaps the most testing. In identifying why programme makers would allow one argument to come over more favourably than another many candidates judged which viewpoint the producers would side with rather than uncovering some editorial strategies to whet the viewer's appetite and charge the argument.



- 4a) It was pleasing to see candidates gain success in citing many ways in which people can demonstrate that they have a conscience, some of which were personal and moving exemplars. Once again where candidates hindered their own ability to access the full range of marks was in their failure to provide development and support with examples. The most common way noted was 'generosity of spirit.'
- 4b) Candidates were keen to furnish examiners with a range of personal experiences and cases to support their explanation of the quotation. In this way they unlocked assessment objective 4 marks by providing experiential knowledge as well as some evaluation and balance. The result was some uplifting and enlightening essays which to varying extents dismissed the myth that all young people have no heart and soul. There was evidence of conscience, ethics and morality being referred to implicitly in a number of ways. Teachers featured greatly as positive role models – understandable in the school context of the examination – but the idea of 'luck' was almost universally ignored and, once again, lends weight to the importance of fully reading and interpreting the question set.
- 5a) This was the least popular question. Those that chose it found difficulty in accessing the high mark bands as they were unable to describe the features of a minority group and resorted to stereotypical viewpoints. Some choices were clearly inappropriate, such as the upper classes, and all of the young people in the UK. Most common choices were Muslims (although this group was often confused with 'Indians' or 'Asians') and Christians. Simple features were identified such as dress, festivals and arranged marriages. There was no evidence of the identification of minority groups by such features as wealth, age range and geographical location.
- 5b) The majority of candidates carried forward their chosen minority groups into this second part of the question. Unfortunately, the poor quality of answers in part a) only lead to sometimes racist, xenophobic and homophobic rhetoric which is totally inappropriate in a public examination. It is important that Centres make clear to candidates that examinations such as General Studies, where candidates are able to put forward a range of views, that they must observe the law and decency. The anonymity of the examiner is not the signal for producing an unruly and offensive rant. Candidates commonly attacked asylum seekers with the view that they were 'stealing our jobs' whereas they are more probably filling the jobs that UK residents do not want to take on. It was disappointing to observe some candidates displaying an inability to examine an issue objectively and produce a balanced response with good analysis and evaluation. Candidates seem to be unaware of cultural concepts and features, as was previously evidenced in question 2a. This is clearly a crucial area for inclusion in the General Studies course if candidates are to be able to express a view on society today.
- 6a) This was by far the most popular question and the answers to this section were generally predictable, effective and secure. Candidates genuinely expressed concerns about what children should not see and how this might be achieved, namely, sex, drugs, excessive alcohol and violence. High marks were gained by some candidates who were able to support their ideas with descriptions of unsavoury examples and incidents. There was an absence of examples given of specific films which should be avoided.

- 6b) There were some very enthusiastic responses to this part of the question and equally, some popular choices of films and television programmes to support candidates' ideas. Examiners saw strong responses from candidates with media experience who gave clear descriptions using appropriate terminology but who were also able to give details of positive and negative changes that had taken place as a result of the film or television programme. The weaker students provided simple descriptions of content and as a result failed to exceed half marks. Indeed, so many essays seized upon one feature that was crucial, for example The Twin Towers made people aware of the War on Terror. Better candidates chose Michael Moores' films, An Inconvenient Truth, and The Queen. Whilst some essays generalised in their content, and one felt that the effect on public opinion was guessed at rather than reasoned or based on knowledge. Other accounts were exceptionally interesting, showing an appreciative and often critical attitude towards the film and programme makers and their ability to inform or even deceive. The impact of 9/11 was clear whereas those candidates who preferred to cite Big Brother, Celebrity Big Brother, Cribs, and Love Island made desperate attempts at supposed influences on public opinion and gained few marks.

## **2962: The Scientific Domain (Written Paper)**

The paper did not achieve as full a spread of marks as in previous years. However it was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates made a serious attempt to answer all parts of the paper and there were very few inappropriate scripts.

### **Section A**

Question 1 differentiated well with many candidates achieving at least half the available marks and some achieving all 20 available.

In question 2 some candidates did spend too much of their time on parts a and d and may have, consequently, had less time to spend on Section B. However many candidates wrote at great length for parts b and c when the marks allocated suggested that all that was needed was a point with relevant development.

### **Section B**

Candidates who did not plan their time well gave insufficient time to Section B.

All three questions were attempted with question 5 being marginally more popular than question 3.

Question 5 proved to be the most popular with question 3 a close second. Several attempted question 4 but had little real knowledge of the role of the National Trust.

Candidates generally did not read questions carefully enough and consequently tended to answer just one part [usually the first] at the expense of the other parts. Also candidates who did not read the question carefully enough tended to go off at a tangent.

Whilst there were several good answers to question 5 and candidates demonstrated sound knowledge of current concerns and possible future developments it would seem that in many cases candidates just restated what they had been taught with little demonstration of independent thought. In contrast question 3 brought out candidates' own knowledge where they were able to discuss issues of direct and personal relevance. For many it may have been the first time that they had thought and written about these issues in the formal situation of an examination.

### **Quality of English**

Written English was generally of a good standard with few spelling errors which, in the most part, did not impede understanding. Handwriting was generally legible and reasonably easy to read.

There has been an increase in the inaccurate use of 'of' as in – "I would of .... " and where candidates are using words given on the question paper these, at least, should have the correct spelling.

### **Time**

In some cases candidates spent far too long either on manual, and often unsuccessful, computation in question 1 or on unnecessarily lengthy development of question 2 b, c and d. Candidates often seem to ignore completely the mark allocations given for the questions and are likely to devote as much time to a ten mark question as to a two mark question.

### **Rubric**

There were few rubric errors.

### **Calculators**

There is still evidence that candidates are not bringing a calculator to the examination.

**Section A**

1	<p>This question differentiated well between candidates with marks covering the full range. The question should have presented few difficulties to the majority of candidates yet a surprising number seemed to be incapable of performing simple arithmetic tasks. Inevitably there was still widespread evidence of calculators not being brought to the exam.</p> <p>This question certainly demonstrated the need for A and A/S students to continue with at least some of the number work covered at GCSE which is needed for everyday tasks. Far too many are writing their answers in lengthy sentences, which inevitably take up valuable time.</p>
a(i)	<p>Many achieved 2 marks, a few gave the correct total but failed to divide by 10. Inevitably a few did not remember how to calculate the mean. There are still a disappointing number of candidates unable to total 10 numbers accurately either with or without a calculator.</p>
(ii)	<p>Again full marks achieved by many. Of those not achieving full marks many identified the two middle values but did not realise that they then had to add them together and divide by two. A few thought that there was only one middle value.</p>
(iii)	<p>Mostly correct.</p>
(iv)	<p>Mostly correct.</p>
b(i)	<p>Most candidates gave the mode. Where candidates had not read the question carefully enough the most common reason for losing this mark was to give 82000 instead of identifying 'which average'.</p>
(ii)	<p>Answers varied considerably but a pleasing number realised that because the mode was so low it was not representative of the cost of housing in this area. Another common response, which was not credited, was to merely define the mode/modal value.</p>
(iii)	<p>A pleasing number identified the median and justified their choice. However a significant number said that they would use the mean. Whilst this was acceptable and a relevant justification was credited [e.g. better candidates demonstrated good understanding of how the mean value can be affected by extremes] many tended to say that the mean (or median) was more 'accurate' rather than more representative of the data. Many considered the mean/median to be a 'fairer average' without further definition.</p>
c	<p>The majority of candidates gave the correct answer. Candidates are not recording their working out and thus running the risk of forfeiting 1 mark in the event of an incorrect answer. There were many attempts at manual calculation eg 10%, 5%, 2.5% which failed at the final hurdle with candidates being unable to add up the figures.</p>
d	<p>Candidates who realised that the house price had to be halved gained full marks. A common misconception was to double the house price and then identify the council tax band. Others identified the band and then doubled the answer.</p>
e(i)	<p>Answers to this part varied considerably – most were able to achieve at least one of the two marks available either by calculation or description. Some chose to calculate an estimate by following the patterns, others referred to graphs, moving averages, identifying trends. All these responses were given credit. A surprising number thought that the values given were already 'averages'.</p>
(ii)	<p>This part also elicited a range of replies including increased fuel prices, more electronic equipment, size of family, use of energy saving devices, climate change. Some responses showed a surprising lack of awareness e.g. a rise in income tax.</p>

2	<p>Answers to this question varied from good succinct well focussed answers to long rambling sometimes irrelevant responses. Some candidates did, unnecessarily, spend a fair amount of time on parts (a) and (d) which may have resulted in their being short of time in Section B. Better candidates structured their time more accordingly. Many wrote long responses to (c) where a brief 'both O.K.' would have been sufficient and long responses to (b) and (d) where a brief point with a brief justification would have scored full marks. These candidates have not been guided by the marks allocated in the brackets.</p>
a	<p>All candidates responded to this question with the expected variation in quality. Candidates who had obviously seen previous examination papers talked about collecting primary data – weighing and measuring people. Others referred to collecting data from schools and doctors.</p> <p>There were references to sample sizes and the quality of the data collection.</p> <p>In referring to the 'OK band' candidates referred to BMI and calculation of averages. For many the 'OK band' was a matter of guesswork making vague references to 'the professional judgement of doctors and nurses.'</p> <p>Weaker candidates failed to consider any collection of data. Others just wrote about the 'OK band'.</p>
b	<p>This was generally well answered. Several candidates identified the positive correlation and the fact that as height increased the 'OK band' tended to widen.</p> <p>Many gave a good first point but then gave the mirror point for their second factor.</p> <p>Common misconceptions were that the graph referred to discrete numbers of people e.g. the 'number' of people in the overweight band increased with height. One candidate thought that as you got heavier you had to get taller.</p>
c (i)	<p>Candidates had few problems with this question although there were a significant number unable to read the graph accurately.</p>
(ii)	<p>Generally well answered with a range of ideas – age, sex, ethnic origin, fitness. The main discriminator being the candidates' ability to provide a supporting statement. Some wrote lengthy evaluations of unhealthy diets and rarely gained credit.</p>
d	<p>Like [a] this question tended to be answered at length. A very small number followed the stages of scientific method indicated in the mark scheme. Others just described various areas that could be researched; there were attempts to widen the research by referring to stress, diet, exercise and medical history.</p> <p>The most common approach was to discuss general health issues, collect further data on people who had heart attacks and plot the data on the given graph.</p> <p>Better candidates related their research to health problems – genetic disorders, smoking, lack of exercise. A surprising number made no mention of heart attacks at all.</p> <p>Very few evaluated the results obtained.</p>
	<p><b>Section B</b></p>
3	<p>This question was more popular with girls than boys with greater confidence exhibited in part (a). Answers to both parts were generally well presented.</p> <p>Candidates showed good knowledge and awareness of issues in both parts of this question with some thoughtful observations and ideas. Those who had something to say wrote at length in both parts illustrating the fact that there was sufficient time especially for part (b).</p>
a	<p>Candidates demonstrated good knowledge of several methods often with correct and detailed development. Most were able to identify and explain at least three methods of contraception. Marks ranged from Band 5 up to, and including, Band 1.</p> <p>Candidates who did not achieve higher bands in this question tended to focus on the advantages and disadvantages of each particular method eg whether or not STIs could be prevented. Many thought that definitions of 'contraception' were needed.</p>

b	<p>Most candidates, though by no means all, explained the three given methods of assisted reproduction with varying degrees of success. Good candidates used more appropriate vocabulary and expressed their ideas in a succinct and scientific way combining technical details, social and scientific evaluations, cost and availability. There was a tendency for weaker candidates to explain each method at length leaving limited time for discussion of the arguments relating to research.</p> <p>IVF and Test Tubes Babies were often described as different methods and there was considerable confusion as to where fertilisation takes place. There was a tendency for candidates to focus on the advantages of each method rather than whether research should continue.</p> <p>Unfortunately a large number ignored the 'scientific' issues altogether and preferred to concentrate on the social, emotional and ethical issues surrounding assisted reproduction. Rarely did candidates consider future development and avenues for scientific research. There also tended to be frequent repetition of the same points for each method. There was an underlying assumption in many of the answers that 'everyone had a right to have a child' and that surrogacy and even cloning were 'common' and 'popular' practices.</p> <p>In other cases it would seem that candidates were so pleased to be able to answer the first part of the question that they forgot to make reference to the second, and more important, part of the question.</p> <p>There were many references to, and evaluation of, adoption as a third method of assisted reproduction.</p>
4	<p>This was the least popular of the questions and answers were often weak and displayed little understanding or awareness of the issues. Most of those attempting this question had little idea of the role or work of the National Trust. However there were a small number of good and moderately good answers.</p>
a	<p>Most candidates used the three given ways and tried to guess at how these activities threatened coastal areas. Many answers were very vague and written in general terms rather than relating the issues to coastal areas.</p> <p>Nearly all candidates referred to the impact of economic activity on coastlines. There were several references to increased amounts of litter and loss of scenic beauty. It was disappointing to note that, when so many travel to places like Spain for their summer holidays, few saw the problems that hotels and tourism can cause to the local area.</p>
b	<p>Most candidates knew nothing of the Neptune campaign. Very few had any idea about the role of the National Trust. Many thought that it was the National Trusts' task to clean up the litter left by tourists and to build groynes to prevent coastal erosion. Better answers referred to preservation of coastal areas for flora and fauna but ideas lacked detail and development.</p> <p>A number of candidates did identify coastal areas but many were far too vague with ideas such as purchasing 'Brighton' or 'Blackpool' being far too common.</p> <p>There were a small number of good answers, demonstrating a combination of personal experience and studied material, that used effective examples from The Lake District, Cornwall and North East England.</p> <p>The question asked candidates to consider reasons for purchase i.e. given the financial restraints why would National Trust choose to purchase one area rather than another? Instead candidates tended to focus more on what the National Trust should do for an area once it had been purchased.</p>
5	<p>This was the most popular question and the one for which candidates seemed to have been the best prepared. Most candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the subject matter but there was an enormous range in the quality of the analysis and evaluation. At times candidates seemed to be listing advantages and disadvantages without having given their ideas any serious thought. Most candidates did well in part (a) and the first part of (b).</p>

a	<p>This question was answered well although inevitably there were candidates that gave the advantages of renewable sources of energy. Better answers considered the advantages and weighed these against the disadvantages of renewable sources. When the candidates divided the answer into three sections [one for each advantage] they invariably achieved at least 6 marks. The most popular advantages were: the technology is already available, high output, ease of obtaining reserves and jobs. There was good evaluation and relevant knowledge showing that candidates were well prepared for this question.</p> <p>Many missed the chance to evaluate cost/accessibility of non-renewables against renewables eg where an advantage was given of 'cheap' and 'easy to access' these advantages were without qualification. Many thought wind farms and solar panels involved far more cost than mining for coal or drilling for oil. Others thought wind farms and solar panels were more unsightly than coal-fired power stations. Some of the 'advantages' had clearly not been thought through.</p>
b	<p>Candidates had been well prepared for this question and many identified at least two solutions, sometimes more. There was a wide range of responses, the most common solutions were to increase use of renewable energy (especially use of more wind farms and solar panels) or to find alternative fuels for motor vehicles, increase taxation on non-renewable fuels, increase use of public transport, use our sources of energy more efficiently and build more nuclear power stations.</p> <p>Better candidates gave two clearly defined solutions and went on to describe and evaluate them. Weaker candidates tended to just list the advantages and disadvantages without any development. There was much focus on the economic rather than the environmental advantages and disadvantages of given solutions.</p> <p>Only the very best candidates made any reference to balancing the growing energy demand with the need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and it was disappointing that candidates did not see the need to refer to this even in their final conclusion.</p> <p>In some cases candidates, having stated a solution, then went on to criticise it through quite strong negative evaluations which rather invalidated their choice.</p>

## **2963: The Scientific Domain (Coursework)**

### **General Comments**

Overall this was a much better year and examiners read many more interesting and thoughtful pieces of work. The main reason for this was that a far greater variety of topics were chosen, reflecting on the whole the individual interests of the candidates. Far fewer centres seemed to decide on the topic which all their candidates would do, provide them with the same pack of material and recommended sites, and insist they follow an identical approach. Not only was differentiation difficult in such cases but it also often limited the candidates chances of getting the high marks as the scope for independent thought was small. Frequently good general guidance was given and then candidates were allowed to follow their own interests. There seemed to be a strong correlation between high marks and giving candidates real freedom to pursue their own topic while following sensible, but not too restrictive guidance.

Of the areas suggested, nuclear power, hydroelectric energy, insulin and genetic engineering were the most popular. Some candidates successfully adapted coursework from a variety of other subjects. More than one examiner commented that many candidates who did well had chosen topics that had not been recommended as it gave them a chance to demonstrate skills and knowledge in areas of particular interest to them.

Where candidates adopted a problem-solving approach which followed the guidelines in the assignment brief, they tended to be successful. Some candidates did carry out small scale surveys, but failed to link them to the issue in any way, leaving it presumably to the examiner to draw some conclusions. Some produced very competent assignments without any use of primary data. The best tended to contain good quality primary data which was properly evaluated and was used to support the problem solving. Examiners recommend if in doubt follow the assignment brief to the letter and give the candidates scope to follow their own interests. At times examiners felt that candidates were not really aware of how marks are allocated. Centres are encouraged to ensure that this happens. Examiners are still tending to get a large number of unsorted downloads from the Internet, great piles of material from which we suppose we are expected to draw some conclusion. Could this be avoided in the future, please?



## 2964: The Social Domain 1 (Written Paper)

### General Comments

The paper took its familiar format with candidates required to answer three questions from Section A and one, from a choice of three, in Section B.

It was clear to examiners that the questions were understood by candidates but that they stumbled particularly on the early questions in Section A. This may be because of the relatively limited experience and horizons of the entry. As a result answers tended to be shallow.

Candidates tended to score a lower percentage of their marks in Section A. The lowest scoring candidates tended not to focus on the question set.

The standard of compositional skills as displayed by many candidates left much to be desired. However some examiners felt that progress was being made in the way centres instruct their candidates to structure an answer. This showed itself in the Section B extended written answers. Here many answers were more structured, with a better formal vocabulary, fewer elementary grammar errors and some punctuation. The writing was more rounded with an introduction and conclusion clearly included.

### Section A

1	(a)	<p>This question asked candidates to suggest three reasons for older people to want a reduction in their Council Tax payments. Most candidates offered three reasons of which the more popular were low income or size of pension, little use of services provided such as education and leisure, poor quality of services and the fact that older people had already paid into the scheme for a long time.</p> <p>Most candidates had some idea of three reasons though frequently they did not develop their thinking enough to be awarded all the marks available for each reason.</p> <p>There was some confusion between candidates over the difference between the current value of a house and its rateable value. Weaker candidates tended to ignore the thrust of the question towards older people.</p>
	(b)	<p>In this question the candidates were asked to explore the fairness of the current system for the calculation of Council Tax through an assessment of the value of a house. Many candidates gained a few marks here though their thinking was generally not clear.</p>
	(c)	<p>The final part of question 1 asked the candidates to focus on the replacement of a Council Tax based upon valuation of a house with a local income tax. It is disappointing to report that many candidates appeared to have little idea of how income tax is calculated.</p> <p>Many suggested that local services should be paid for by those using them. There appeared to be little support for the notion of social responsibility. Many wrote of the unfairness for rich people having to pay more to support those less well off.</p> <p>Examiners found it interesting that many candidates felt it unfair that taxes should increase if employees worked hard for higher pay and promotion. They suggested that workers would not look for higher pay if tax increased.</p> <p>Perhaps the weakest part of the answers to this question was the failure of candidates to fully articulate and develop their response.</p>

2		<p>The key point in this question was the focus on the right to strike of those in essential emergency services. It is pleasing to note that many candidates were able to articulate both sides of this argument.</p> <p>The best answers differentiated between the cases of firefighters and refuse collectors. These better answers also reflected upon the effect of a pay increase upon council tax rates and its repercussions for the strikers who would eventually have to pay higher taxes themselves.</p> <p>The majority of candidates appeared to accept that these workers did have right to strike whilst recognising the implications for the local community. One examiner concluded with the phrase 'empathy appears to be the enemy of analysis'.</p> <p>Some candidates read the question as the reasons for a pay rise rather than focusing on the right to strike.</p>
3		<p>This question required candidates to describe an investigation they could undertake into the efficiency and effectiveness of one of three local services. The question discriminated well between the range of candidates.</p> <p>The list of potential performance indicators provided in the question was used by many candidates to structure their answers.</p> <p>Candidates had to select one service from refuse collection, sports centres and libraries. There was an almost equal split in the choice exercised.</p> <p>Surprisingly a small number of candidates elected to write three paragraphs, one for each of the services. In these cases examiners marked all three and selected the best paragraph.</p> <p>Once again examiners commented on the poor quality of the candidates problem solving and investigative skills. This is not the first time that reports have identified this weakness in the preparation of candidates. Centres are recommended to reconsider the ways in which they cover these investigative skills. Candidates need to be far less hazy in identifying what they are measuring or observing, the ways in which they can go about this and the potential conclusions to be drawn.</p> <p>Weaker answers tended to write about the potential shortcomings of their chosen service without coming to an investigation.</p>

**Section B**

4	(a)	<p>The question considered the advantages and disadvantages of using voting to appoint head teachers, judges or doctors. The most popular choice was the head teacher. Some better candidates noted the need to ensure that the appointment of judges did not compromise their impartiality through politicisation. Many candidates found this quite a challenging topic. Better answers were able to differentiate between different electorates.</p> <p>Some candidates suggested that the electorate might select candidates without appropriate qualifications.</p>
	(b)	<p>In this question the candidates had to describe the ways in which large and small parliamentary majorities could lead to good government. They needed also to assess the potential of a minority government.</p>

		<p>Better answers were able to include appropriate examples. These included the size of the labour majority in 1997 and the 2007 situation in the Scottish parliament.</p> <p>One sound starting point for this question would have been a definition or description of good government. Few candidates did produce any definition. Instead the definition emerged through the treatment of each of the cases.</p>
5	(a)	<p>Candidates had to select two leading political figures at the start of this question. Popular choices included Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Margaret Thatcher, Winston Churchill, Hitler, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela.</p> <p>The choice of two was crucial to the identification of an issue upon which they would hold contrasting views.</p>
	(b)	<p>The territory of this question was the differences of view between local and national perspectives. Three possible examples were provided in the question and most answers stayed with these. The more popular ones were 'the closure of local uneconomic schools' and 'the closure of local accident and emergencies services'.</p> <p>Of the two perspectives those looking at the local view were most developed. At the national level comments were mainly in terms of saving money.</p> <p>There were some very strong responses to this question. They revealed informed and engaged candidates who recognised the difference that scale can make to the way policies are viewed.</p>
6	(a)	<p>This was the most popular of the questions in Section B. This may have been because of its topicality or its congruence with the everyday experience of candidates.</p> <p>A wide range of arguments were deployed against the use of speed cameras. Many of these showed good development.</p>
	(b)	<p>There was a great variety of quality in the responses to this popular question. Good answers tended to list a wide range of everyday reasons for the choice of mode of transport. Very good answers took the question further to look into the nature and formation of peoples' attitudes, the ambiguity of science on these matters, the prospect of new inventions saving the planet and the lack of concern by many for the environment.</p> <p>Weaker answers tended to generalise with statements such as 'cars are faster than trains'. Of course, in reality, this statement needs considerable qualification.</p> <p>Many candidates appeared to have a very false view of the costs of using a car. They suggested that the only cost was that for fuel. This may reflect the ownership of the cars the candidates use. They did not mention the frequent delays that occur on motorways, main roads and in town centres.</p>

## **Conclusions**

It was clear to examiners that in some centres the candidates had been prepared by the staff for this examination. The questions are all drawn from the published syllabus and some centres had clearly used this to design their teaching programme. At the same time these centres had also used past examination papers to familiarise candidates with the style of question, pace needed and the demands of short and extended writing questions. This contrasted strongly with centres where the candidates appeared to have had little preparation.

The greater majority of candidates used their time well. They had clearly been busy developing fairly long scripts. Very few candidates did not complete the paper in the time available and their attention to producing a more developed response to Section B was clearly evident. The single paragraph responses to each of the parts of Section B appeared to be a thing of the past.

Examiners noted the following words as proving difficult for candidates; there and their, to, two and too, convenient, parliament and develop.

Centres are reminded of the importance of the mark allocations shown on the paper. Where a question is worth three marks it is expected that the key idea is developed through exemplification or finer specification. In a number of cases the candidates appeared completely unaware of this guidance.

A number of questions in this paper gave supportive clues to shape an answer. For example question 3 offered several performance indicators. Question 4(b) identified three scenarios and question 5 (b) had several suitable examples within the stem of the question. Some candidates used these clues to good effect.

Finally examiners would like to report how much they enjoyed so many very good scripts. They showed a community that was aware, well informed and articulate. Examiners had just the one major concern that so many candidates did not show or espouse a collective responsibility within society for those less fortunate than themselves.

**2965: The Scientific & Cultural Domains (Written Examination)**

**General Comments**

The examination paper followed its usual format with candidates expected to answer two questions in the one and half hours provided. One question was to be chosen from the three provided in the scientific domain. The second question was to be chosen from the three in the cultural domain. Only one or two of the large number of candidates taking this examination did not follow this rubric.

Staff and students in the greater majority of centres are to be congratulated on the motivation, energy and skill with which they approached this examination. Most candidates produced two well formed essays with a clear introduction, development and conclusion. The introductions provided showed that candidates had a good understanding of the questions set. Conclusions frequently appeared as a summary of the points made and a final point of balance. In this session there were some outstanding essays that were a pleasure to read.

It was particularly pleasing to read pieces within the essays that demonstrated that the candidates were able to use their own experiential knowledge with facility. Centres are reminded that the use of examples is a sound way to improve essays.

Some of the questions in this paper provided a structure to guide the candidates. For example in question 5 the candidates were invited to recognise the arguments that parents might use. In the second part of their answer the candidate was expected to offer arguments to change the views of parents. Similarly in question 3 the candidates were asked to undertake two tasks. The first was to bring forward arguments for the siting of an industrial activity in an environmentally sensitive area. The second task was to outline what local authorities might do to reduce the impact of the development. This structuring was followed by most candidates and balanced answers were read. Some candidates tended to focus in an unbalanced way on one of the tasks with only passing reference to the other part of the question. Such answers were clearly self penalising.

For the majority of candidates their ability to communicate, the clarity of handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar showed improvement on previous years.

**Comments on Individual Questions**

1.	<p>This was a fairly popular question. Many answers showed that candidates could cite three difficulties for those studying the history of science. These usually revolved around the lack of documentation of ancient discoveries, the role of team activity and the notion of finding being built upon the work of predecessors. A number of interesting additional points included the influences of gender and religion.</p> <p>Candidates used the examples provided in the question to develop their responses. In addition a number of other scientists were mentioned including Crick and Watson and Curie. The use of examples could do much to enhance the quality of answers to this question.</p>
2.	<p>This was a popular question and a wide range of innovations was suggested. Popular ones included SATNAV and tracking or safety devices within a mobile phone. These usually yielded considered justifications and both positive and negative social implications. More self indulgent were the answers calling for continuous television broadcasts to be available on the mobile phone screen to relieve the boredom of bus journeys.</p> <p>One examiner noted that at times the modern mobile phone might well start to resemble the traditional Swiss Army knife if all of the candidates' ideas were adopted.</p>

	<p>The least successful answers tended to drift into innovations that were drawn from the realms of science fiction. These had little link to everyday life and as such their social implications were hard to expose.</p>
3.	<p>This was a popular question in some centres. Clearly some candidates, usually those in economically depressed areas, had experienced this decision in their own locality. They recognised the way in which regeneration could be achieved if some relaxation of environmental controls took place.</p> <p>One feature of answers was the lack of understanding of what might constitute an environmentally sensitive area. Whilst specialist knowledge was not expected, too many candidates did not appear to have any concept of what might constitute such an area. Some appeared to think of such areas as those where the residents were most likely to complain.</p> <p>In terms of the role of the local authorities many candidates overestimated planning powers. Too frequently candidates appear to think that the government and local authorities are the same organisation and that they are all powerful. They suggested that governments can control the price of land and commodities and even decide the ways in which the internal workings of an industrial plant might operate. Better candidates recognised the balance between restriction and freedom to develop an industry.</p> <p>It was perhaps disappointing that few candidates named actual examples of this type of activity. Notably one centre used examples from the Peak District and another the Lake District to good effect.</p> <p>Another disappointment was the resistance some candidates displayed to the thrust of the question. For them environmental concerns were paramount and the needs of the local people or the economy were a very poor second and third.</p>
4.	<p>This was not a popular question. Few candidates showed much understanding of the humanist position. This is surprising given its explicit position in the specification.</p> <p>Those who were able to offer some of the tenets of humanism were then able to match these to the familiar ideas upon which religion is based.</p> <p>Only a minority of candidates was able to find areas of commonality and mismatch in the two positions.</p> <p>A disturbing feature this year was the generally negative way in which religion was viewed. Too often candidates suggested that religions were at the source of so many of the problems faced by society.</p>
5	<p>This was the most popular question in the Cultural Domain section of the paper. The greater majority of candidates showed a considered understanding of the position of parents who were reluctant for their children to study these subjects. They explained that parents were motivated by consideration of the longer term implications of study of a particular subject at university. Debt, lack of jobs, competition and narrowing of options were mentioned frequently. Others noted that when parents went to university the reading of a more conventional list of subjects was the normal practice.</p> <p>It is pleasing to report that the candidates defended these subjects with vigour and argument. One or two candidates did assert that it was a matter of rights to choose what ever subject was enjoyed. Others gave more considered responses arguing a range of</p>

	reasons. Architecture was the most popular subject chosen for defence. A small number of better candidates commented that they found the inclusion of architecture in the list rather surprising.
6	Though this was not as popular a choice as question 5 it did produce some splendid answers. Candidates selecting this question did so from a position of strength. They were able to use a wide range of examples to support their answers. Their knowledge, one expects drawn from studies in Art and English Literature, was exceptional and impressive.

## 2966: The Social Domain 2 (Written Paper)

### 1 General Comments

All examiners felt that the level of difficulty of the paper was appropriate to the cohort of students who took it. Many colleagues also found much to praise in the way the paper was tackled. A typical comment was that “the general presentation and literary quality of answers continues to improve”. Most candidates wrote answers which showed that they had taken the paper seriously, and of these, many wrote well-informed and well-argued answers showing both relish and conviction.

Although a majority of the answers were well written, some candidates’ spelling was uneven, as was their syntax. Common errors were the confusion of **to** and **too**, **led** and **lead**, **there** and **their**, and predictably in question 1, **effect** and **affect**. **Alot**, too, is now **definatly** (sic) a single word for some candidates. Handwriting was usually acceptably clear, and most candidates structured their work in paragraphs. Punctuation was acceptable, although it now seems as though the semi colon and colon are redundant stops for most candidates.

It was very pleasing to note that many candidates spent care and time on planning their responses, with a consequent gain in clarity and focus. On the other hand, many candidates do not spend enough time analysing the question so that they are sure of its boundaries. This makes them more liable to lose focus. For example, question 3, answered by over 90% of the candidates, specifically refers to the difficulties experienced **by the police** in enforcing the law. This did not prevent up to a third of candidates from moving away from this tight focus into more general consideration of the justice system, the law itself and prisons.

Finally, it was very pleasing to see only a very small number of scripts setting out to be deliberately offensive or entirely facetious. As one examiner put it “candidates seemed grateful to be given the opportunity to reveal their thoughts on and aspirations for important issues in their lives”.

### 2 Comments on Individual Questions

#### QUESTION ONE

This was seen by colleagues as a very accessible question, and answered as such by a majority of candidates. It allowed for candidates to make fruitful use of their personal experience and history, although over-reliance on those was a trap into which many of them fell.

The key elements of a sound answer were a workable definition of the elastic term *community* and sound exemplifications of different modes of community. Having assembled these, the candidate could then go on to discuss and analyse the plural effects of these different communities.

Many candidates managed the first part of the question acceptably by adducing their own experience. They ably differentiated compulsory communities (schools and families) and voluntary ones (rugby teams and quiz leagues). Similarly, the distinction between communities of belief (churches and political parties) and those founded in practicality (neighbourhoods and towns) was often well made.

Fewer proceeded to perform equally well on the second part of the question, which required them to conceptualise and analyse experiences and draw conclusions from them.



This required them to balance the positive and negative effects of communities, which was something they found themselves unable to do.

At higher levels many candidates wrote highly personal, “felt” responses which were touching, even distressing, to read. One candidate wrote of searching for, and finding a community where it was possible safely to be honest about one’s sexuality. Another wrote angrily but lucidly of the problems of living on a ‘sink’ estate where aspiration was treated with scorn. Less personal but equally effective were those who used the resource as a plan and wrote vigorous rebuttals (and/or defences) of Peter Preston. There was also a large number of responses dealing very effectively with internet communities, one of which produced the pleasing perception that the internet was the only community in which it is possible truly to live existentially.

Less able candidates stayed at the descriptive level and often referred to the effects of communities on their social development without saying what social development actually meant. The strength and richness of the question was confirmed by the many ways in which it could be effectively answered.

It was also a question which stimulated candidates into making resonant phrases which were a pleasure to note down. Thus:

- “I believe that community spirit should focus on tackling the differences between people rather than celebrating the similarities”.
- “For a couple of years I was a chav. It was often a laugh, but it was never fun”.

## **QUESTION TWO**

This was the least popular question – one colleague cited a Centre where in an entry of a hundred and twenty, she had seen three answers. Moreover, most who attempted it did not identify the thrust of the question effectively and did not deal with the economic dimension at all. At one end of the spectrum a good response had to understand the issue of social implications, both positive and negative. So, in dealing with the “pink pound”, such answers would analyse the stereotyping and increased social hostility which might result from the economic validation of such a minority group. Equally, a good answer would highlight the empowerment and affirmation which such economic validation could provide.

Those who wrote of the “grey pound” often did so in disparaging terms. There were scornful references to Saga holidays, stair lifts and plastic surgery. Such responses, essentially based in stereotypes, attracted little credit.

Most responses also ignored the need to relate economic influence to social implication, and some also cited “minorities” which were nothing of the sort – young people and motorists, for example.

## **QUESTION THREE**

This was the most popular question, answered by over 90% of the cohort.

Regrettably, many of the responses lost marks by failing to observe the boundaries of the question. A generalised essay on crime, soft sentencing policy, the judiciary and political correctness could only be mined by examiners for its relevance, which often proved to be marginal. A majority of answers failed to maintain the required focus on the police. This often allowed candidates more scope for unsupported assertion and the citation of urban myth which did little to enhance their attainment.

The best answers were those which dispensed with anecdote and concentrated on such areas as the public perception of the nature of law enforcement. One candidate wrote that *“the perceived politicisation of the police during the miners’ strike of 1988 did irreparable harm to an institution already damaged by corruption scandals, the Dirty Squad investigations and allegations about Freemasonry”*. You do not have to agree with any of that in order to acknowledge the sophistication of the thinking behind it.

Likewise, the “perceived politicisation” of the police was often cited by the most able candidates as the reason why they had become the target for frustration and discontent. Others analysed the cultural shift which empowered the public in a more thorough realisation of their rights which had not been paralleled in a similar realisation of their duties. Such answers, obviously the production of clear thinking and focused teaching, were a pleasure to read.

On the other hand, the candidate who wrote that *“it was ok to be a policeman in the days when you could beat people up and no questions asked”* told us as much about himself as he did about why the police are so mistrusted. There was a small cohort of answers in this vein.

Many middle grade candidates concentrated more on the society which the police have to serve, detailing elements of it which make it hard to police. Such answers could be credited to the extent that these elements were aptly cited, described and evaluated as to their effect on the police. Among these elements were binge-drinking (and the resulting social dis-inhibition), gang culture, the “war on terror”, rap artists and their anti-social lyrics, and the acceptance of language such as “pigs” and “filth” as ways of talking of the police.

The media also came in for their share of blame, both in terms of news/documentary and drama. Personality-based drama (*A Touch of Frost, Dalziel and Pascoe*) was generally seen as a celebration of the values of an earlier police force. Other, grittier drama (*The Bill*) was seen as unhelpful to the police’s image.

It should be emphasised in conclusion that this question, like any other popular question, needed to be approached with care.

There is no such thing as an easy question in Advanced Level General Studies, and sensible candidates need to have this always in mind. If a question looks easy, then that is a part of its difficulty.

A sound answer needs to have a secure knowledge base and an understanding of the implications of that knowledge. It should be written in language which acknowledges the complexity of the question and matches it; and it needs to analyse issues and evaluate arguments logically, dispassionately, and with precision.

Finally, the candidate needs to be able to evaluate the different kinds of knowledge available to the intelligent general reader. A sentence beginning *“Home Office crime statistics show that”* is always going to be more convincing than one beginning *“My grandpa told me”*.

#### QUESTION FOUR

This was the second most popular question, and again one which was deceptively simple. Few candidates who opted to answer it had difficulty in suggesting changes which they would like to see made. Unfortunately many of them paid little regard to feasibility (*“House prices should be reduced by 75%”, “The manufacture and sale of alcohol and tobacco should cease at once”*). A similar number seemed to think that implementing the changes would be simple. It is a matter for some concern that intelligent young people seem to think that anything, up to and including changing the way people think and feel, can be legislated for.

There was also a minority of candidates who announced that they did not feel change to be possible, and explained why. There was another minority who provided an overview of all that they saw as being wrong with society without ever suggesting how any of those things might be changed. Such answers received little credit.

The best responses were from those candidates to whom the question had spoken in a personal way. Such responses – concerning such issues as racialism, religious intolerance, the environment, social alienation, the underclass, the monarchy, celebrity culture, “reality” television, the debasement of popular culture, drugs, third world debt and poverty – were often well informed, passionately argued and idealistic.

Like question three, this one required a solid and well-exemplified knowledge base. It could not necessarily be attempted by a candidate equipped only with intelligence and a ready pen. This observation - which applies to the whole of the specification, in point of fact – is one which cannot be too often emphasised.

## **2967: Social Domain 2 (Coursework)**

2007 was a much better year in many respects; the only sad note was the continued decline of numbers for this coursework unit.

What worked best? Following the brief and keeping the focus on the role of the state were the two key factors explaining success. It was good to see that instead of candidates from a centre all doing exactly the same title, there were a large number of very different topics chosen. Often they were issues which were clearly close to candidates' hearts and there was a refreshing amount of originality. Often in the past when every candidate from a centre had taken on exactly the same issue and used exactly the same pack of material and websites, differentiation was very difficult.

Presentation was generally good, but then we live in the age of the computer and spell-check so it should be. There was much more sign this year of valuable learning taking place as students who had really thought about what the state should, or should not, be doing and did more research to try and come to some sort of individual conclusion.

There were some fascinating pieces of work on issues such as whether the state should be obliged to assist in the healthcare of those who drank too much, or those who became deliberately pregnant in order to qualify for state provided housing. There were also some very strong, and diverse, views on what the state should or should not do for immigrants and asylum seekers. Other topics which worked very well ranged from state provision for the Arts, through control of the media to childcare and smoking. On the whole there was plenty of good reading.

Those who did less well tended to describe an issue – say the provision of public transport in area – and end body lamely saying 'the government should do/spend more....' There was a great willingness to give the state much more power and there was an inevitable assumption that the Treasury was sitting on top of an unlimited supply of taxpayers money. There was a tendency to shy away from thinking about the role of the state and just describe what the state did. Questionnaires often did not help-and in fact were actually irrelevant in some cases. There was still a tendency to overuse the Internet and include material which was only vaguely relevant. One student for example who took on the issue of AIDS prevention managed to find a mass of material on what the Government was doing and used that to avoid talking about what was asked, which was what the state/government should be doing. The internet is a brilliant source of information but it should not be used as a substitute for independent thinking. Too often we got large pieces of vaguely relevant information and the candidate seemed to assume we would plough through it and try and discern from it what the candidate might be thinking about the role of the state.

## **2968: Making Connections (Written Examination)**

### **General Comments**

The examination set out several contrasting and diverse sources of information from which candidates were able to develop and select ideas in order to furnish an answer to two quite different questions. At the outset, there needs to be some reminder of the aim of this examination: to make connections between three domains (cultural, scientific, and social) both discretely and through their overlap and integration. This provides a platform for the aspiring candidate to not simply display a plethora of knowledge but to develop a reasoned and synthesised response to some of the important issues which affect mankind. In the best essays, examiners expected to see a development of ideas to their fullest potential, either using personal projections and philosophy or the questioning of established dogma, thereby giving the candidate the opportunity to practice advanced skills in analysis and reasoning. At the other end of the scale, examiners expected to see simple interpretations of the source material with little more than a basic value-judgement on its validity and relevance. In both cases, examiners were not disappointed as the paper solicited a very wide range of outcomes from the exceptional to the trivial.

By presenting sources that were visual, numeric, and in prose, candidates were offered a wide range to synthesise and utilise. For both questions, the experience of using resources to furnish an answer in some AS papers served some candidates well. At this higher level, examiners expect to see more than simple description. Some engagement with the material including the questioning of its provenance, validity, scope, and relevance would clearly point a candidate towards the higher mark bands. Centres are reminded to consult the mark band descriptors to be found in Mark Scheme in order to become aware of the rationale behind the awarding of credit for essays in this Unit. To accede to Band 1 there needs to be evidence of:

- an understanding of the requirements of the question
- writing that is relevant, with words carefully chosen
- an avoidance of excessive length, repetition, and irrelevance
- ideas that are perceptive, pertinent, and elegantly displayed with thoughtful consideration to complex issues.

Plainly, it is important to execute a planned response and Centres may well practise this skill in General Studies lessons. However, examiners take this opportunity issue a reminder to ensure that the content of the three domains is revisited prior to the A2 examination. For example, Sources 1 and 2 question mankind's beliefs, values, and morals (Unit 2961), whereas Source 3 is linked to human behaviour, community life and relationships (Unit 2966). With this in mind, it is perhaps timely to remind Centres of the aims of this Unit:

- the explicit drawing together and application of knowledge, understanding and skills acquired and developed in different parts of the Advanced GCE course
- the composition of essays which allow candidates to draw together material from the course and to demonstrate the transfer of skills.

Most candidates produced essays that were thoughtful and considered with a good structure, though introductions were at sometime brief or non-existent. Conclusions were variable and sometimes left the reader puzzled or simply repeated the key points. Most candidates were able to produce some additional knowledge and information to bolster their assertions (a frequent weakness in essays). It is pleasing to report that there were few examples of facetious or offensive answers. Time management continues to improve with examiners seeing some outstanding responses written in a forty-five minute period. The quality of English was satisfactory to good though the overall attention to the technical matters of grammar, punctuation and syntax seemed to remain a cause for comment.

## Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 The essay involved two key components. A brief outline of the messages contained within Sources 1 and 2 followed by a discussion of a main priority. Examiners were overwhelmed with long descriptions of the two photographs which involved the identification of starvation and poverty (Source 1) and affluence and progress (Source 2). This was not what was required to access the higher mark bands. Indeed, the Sources were there to serve as a catalyst to the main part of the essay which was the identification of a priority which could emanate from any one of the domains or a combination of them. The Sources should be used to contextualise some of the key issues and thereby be used to make meaningful contrasts. In high quality responses there should be a deal of discernment and cogency, flair and confidence in the presentation of arguments. Words would be used sparingly but for maximum effect. At the same time, examiners look for the promotion of several points of view or issues, sometimes even if these are at odds with society or the candidate's own opinions. There were many examples of work approaching these heights on a topic which was so open-ended it allowed candidates a free rein to pursue an ideal of their own. It was perhaps this freedom of choice that caused other candidates the most consternation. The average response was mostly descriptive with a poor structure and little extension to the points made. Some of the priorities made would be weakly grounded or quite unfeasible.

This question proved a very good discriminator as its success was reliant upon the level of ability of the candidate to create and sustain arguments that related to the extremes to be found in our everyday life and then go on to make connections between these and the domains. The best answers avoided merely describing the pictures and instead interpreted the message that lay behind. Links between the effects of GM crops, advances in vaccination and medicine, the overwhelming debt of the Third World were linked to social injustice, the class system and the gulf between the rich and poor. Examiners are always looking for lively debate and the best students were rewarded with Band 1 marks for doing just this: analysis of the feasibility of 'fixing' the problem, sharing the success and affluence and unravelling the problems of aid work and the corruption to be found in some governments. This was indeed the territory of marks to be gained for assessment objective 4 by exploring the limitations, effects and dilemmas faced by the participants in such a complex and long running saga.

On the other hand, the ill-prepared did little more than describe the images as they saw them followed by a list of contrasts without justification or using simple statements like 'it's not fair'. Indeed, it was remarkable to note the number of candidates who sincerely believed that the cessation of space exploration would be the end to world poverty. Answers such as this suggested poor preparation, a lack of understanding or appreciation for world affairs and an inability to extend the candidates thinking beyond the basic.

So much depended on the candidates' ability and willingness to introduce a reasoned case, a controlled personal view that they were prepared to attack as well as defend and couple this with examples and cases to gain support from across the domains. Overall the spirit of making connections was evident but in reality there was a general lack of sophistication in the shaping and presenting of the final piece. Centres are recommended to look into the possibility of including open-ended questions for controversial clashes of interpretation in a debate-style context during General Studies lessons. This will provide valuable and much-needed opportunities for candidates to explore different kinds of knowledge and thereby practise the acquisition of these most valuable of marks.

- 2 In contrast, question 2 offered the candidates an opportunity to express their views on a topic that is seldom out of the news and that, for many of them, has become an important part of their social life. The essay was in two parts: the identification of three consequences followed by a discussion of one key issue. The sources are there for reference and are not specifically referred to in the question.

Many candidates felt more comfortable with this question because they could draw upon personal experience, though this did not always prove to be an advantage because the least able often slipped into anecdotal irrelevance. It seemed easy to slip into the trap of short, simple references to a consequence from each domain. There is an indication that practice is needed in idea development such as 'a social consequence of alcohol abuse is the breakdown in relationships'. In itself this is worthy of credit but only on a simple level. The response would improve by reference to how it affects relationships (between partners, friends, and work colleagues) in terms of trust, well-being, understanding, and emotional damage. Case studies would clearly help in the extension of an answer such as this. By covering each part of the question in some way and with varying degrees of success it was possible for most candidates to gain a mark in Band 3 (21 – 40 marks). The key to greater success hinged on logical sequencing of ideas.

Social consequences were dealt with the most effectively although they tended to be restricted to abusive and violent behaviour. Key issues most often identified involved peer pressure, the media, and the 'new' UK licensing hours. A number of ways of dealing with the problem often centred, quite sensibly, on education and schools. The control of advertising, particularly of supermarket chains offering cheap deals on bulk purchase of alcohol, was most often vilified. The censoring of alcohol advertisements, particularly during family viewing hours, was often cited, and this grew into a particularly effective argument if it was coupled with reference to how age is an important factor (and then linked this to the sources). In this way a candidate was able to make a strong link between changes in UK culture through a social avenue that had a scientific effect – namely the health of the nation.

In the case of weak candidates it was so often found that consequence was confused with cause; this resulted in a different essay that offered less opportunities for the development of ideas and the acquisition of assessment objective 4 marks. So often there was acknowledgement and recognition of the increase in binge drinking but with no reasons offered for its popularity. In weak answers, ways of dealing with the problems were listed rather than explained, analysed and explored.

This question offers the perfect opportunity for candidates to present a case using a subject with which they have some knowledge and experience but their attempts were, at times, spoiled by an over inclusion of irrelevance. Examiners were looking for references to the sources to aid *understanding* and to *develop* ideas; in addition, examples and case studies would consolidate opinions and viewpoints. In providing an extravagance of points some candidates lost sight of the aim of the question: to *make connections* between the domains through the *selection* and *integration* of knowledge and evidence whilst showing some understanding of the *value*, *relevance* and importance of this *knowledge*.

It is pleasing to report great advances towards achieving this 'making connections' goal by many candidates during this Session.

**Advanced GCE General Studies (3831/7831)  
June 2007 Assessment Series**

**Unit Threshold Marks**

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2961	Raw	100	74	67	60	53	47	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	68	60	53	46	39	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2964	Raw	100	67	60	53	47	41	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2965	Raw	100	78	71	64	57	51	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2966	Raw	100	68	61	54	47	41	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2967	Raw	100	66	58	50	42	35	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2968	Raw	100	69	63	57	52	47	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

**Specification Aggregation Results**

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
<b>3831</b>	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
<b>7831</b>	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
<b>3831</b>	9.4	24.5	44.8	66.1	83.3	100	25683
<b>7831</b>	9.7	27.1	52.6	77.9	93.7	100	14999

40682 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see;  
[http://www.ocr.org.uk/exam\\_system/understand\\_ums.html](http://www.ocr.org.uk/exam_system/understand_ums.html)

Statistics are correct at the time of publication



*Report on the Units taken in June 2007*

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