

General Studies

Advanced GCE A2 H479

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H079

Report on the Units

January 2009

H079/H479/MS/R/09J

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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Advanced GCE General Studies (H479)

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Chief Examiners Introduction

This was the first set of papers for this new specification. It is pleasing to report the success of these papers and the positive responses of the examiners when reading candidates' scripts. In general many of the strengths of the previous specification have been continued in these papers. This continuity has clearly enabled centres to prepare their candidates with a degree of confidence. It appears that candidates reacted positively and with energy to the questions set. They showed themselves, on the whole, to be engaged with and knowledgeable of many of the important issues in the UK in the twenty-first century.

Four common concerns emerged across the papers and these may be summarised as follows:

- 1 The two papers at AS level now cover all three domains. Centres should remind candidates that the examination for Unit 731 is two hours in length and covers two domains, The Cultural and Social Domain. The one hour paper for the Scientific Domain (Unit 732) also includes a section on mathematics; Centres are reminded that calculators may be used for the paper.
- 2 Both papers include compulsory short answer sections. The marks allocated for these are shown with each part question. These sub-marks are a good indication of the time to be allocated by candidates. Some candidates tended to spend too much time writing long responses to these short answer questions and consequently reduced the time available for their longer essays.
- 3 In both papers candidates have to produce a piece of extended writing. The questions have been set with care and it is important that candidates structure their responses to meet the specific demands of the question. Centres may wish to deconstruct some question with candidates to give them experience of reading the guidance provided. This applies particularly for those candidates whose subject choices to date have not included experience of producing extended writing.
- 4 This was a new specification and there have been small changes to the structure of papers. It was noted that an increased number of candidates committed rubric infringements. Since the rubric requirements for these papers are not complex a short briefing for candidates is suggested.

Unit F731 The Cultural and Social Domains

General Comments

This was the first sitting of a new examination combining, for the first time, two domains in a two hour examination. This has meant a restructuring of the examination format but not so much as to create something completely new. Each domain is covered in one half of the paper and continuity between old and new specifications is maintained by the inclusion of short answer and essay questions separated into the different sections of the paper.

In this first sitting of the F731 paper examiners were very encouraged by the way in which candidates approached questions in a determined and robust fashion. There was clear evidence of good preparation and examiners were left in no doubt that the time allocation of two hours for the four sections was enough to produce a good quality performance. Where there was evidence of brevity in the final Section D, this was usually caused by over enthusiasm in the previous Section C. Indeed, Centres need to be reminded that in Sections A and C the questions have been deliberately structured to elicit answers that match the number of marks allocated. It is therefore fruitless to write at length for an answer that is allocated two marks since, invariably, the mark scheme will be asking for a single piece of information plus a supporting statement.

The clearest way to present an essay in the suggested thirty minutes available is to work within a simple structure. The examiner is therefore guided through the candidate's thoughts in a straightforward and logical way. Invariably an essay will be presenting an argument or series of arguments. The balanced discussion of these will form the main body of the text. This will most generally be surrounded by an opening passage which may pose questions suggested by the title, or simply an interpretation of the terms of reference. In the final section or paragraph a concluding statement or suggested pathway for the future might be proposed. This simple pattern invariably leads to marks of a high level as the examiner is able to participate in a virtual communication with the candidate. The poorest work occurs as a result of the rapid and random writing of information which has no logical thread or stream for the examiner to follow. It was this lack of structure that restricted the marks of some candidates and, as a result, failed to build upon the promise shown by many in Sections A and C.

The new examination format has heralded no marked change in standards of communication; these remain adequate. It is frustrating for examiners to see the simplest of words spelt incorrectly even when they are given in the sources or as part of the question. Centres are asked to encourage proof reading as part of the time management process as this important issue is clearly being overlooked. It should be remembered that the communication mark impacts on the marks for analysis and development in assessment objectives 2 and 3 therefore a read through of material is clearly worth doing.

Comments on individual questions

Section A

- 1 Many candidates scored well in this section of the paper by answering with clear, well-organised responses covering independence, communication, practicalities and entertainment. Some candidates referred to negative influences, such as over dependence on the innovations with the subsequent loss of independence, but these were in the minority. Although 1c) and 1d) did carry the most marks in this section, some candidates wrote very long responses which affected their time management and had a subsequent effect on other sections of the paper. Conversely, some candidates failed to develop points or became concerned with general developments in the telecommunications industry and

wrote in broad terms about how technology had improved. As a result, the nine marks available were out of their reach.

Section B

- 2 This was by far the most popular question in this section and was done very well in many cases. Some candidates were able to analyse the complexity of each point seeing how, quite possibly, a negative could be a positive. There was clear evidence of experience being used as a source of information and this was to be welcomed as it amply backed up key points and issues raised in the essay. The awareness and perception of candidates concerning family matters was quite revealing, as was their ability to cite examples of school and peer groups. This added volume to the arguments as long as there was not diversion from the main thrust of the question. Strength of analysis and the injection of personal opinion were clear indicators of successful answers as was the ability to identify the extent of 'strict'. Weak candidates sometimes made sweeping generalisations and offered little in the way of exemplification or support. Religion, discipline and work ethic were the most frequently cited topics.
- 3 Few candidates attempted this question. The problem that most encountered was tackling the main part of the question - to discuss ways in which daily newspapers meet the **expectations** of their readers. Examiners were looking for evidence of an understanding of what people want: accuracy, realism, detail, views, something that they can follow easily and with which, possibly, they can empathise. Most candidates repeated a simple media analysis of a newspaper headline, font, and photographs – with little reference to the question. There were many sweeping assertions and generalisations, with insufficient reference to expectations. It is also worth remembering that when the command word 'discuss' is used there is a general expectation for two views to be proposed.
- 4 Very few responses to this question were seen. Music was the most popular art form to be considered but, invariably, candidates focused on the music and not on the innovations. Access to music (through iTunes, the Internet, and television) is not what was required by this question; reference needed to be made to the art form itself such as a discussion of the fusion of styles, the influences of culture, or in the case of film 3D, HD and Blue Ray. Centres should be aware that candidates are expected to be familiar with two out of the nine art forms listed in Section 3.2 of the General Studies specification.

Section C

- 5 It was clear to examiners that most candidates were not prepared sufficiently for questions related to this section of the specification and in the case of question 5a) it appeared that the terms were largely misunderstood. Answers to this question, which required some exactness and precise placing of knowledge, contrasted greatly with question 5b) where candidates seemed to have plenty to say since there was the opportunity to elaborate from a personal viewpoint. Question 5c) produced the most positive response as candidates were able to elicit a strength and weakness of each image. Most offered at least a few developments, although weaker answers contained a list of simple statements rather than developing one as the question required. Literal descriptions of the photographs were not what was required and therefore gained few marks.

Section D

- 6 This proved an unpopular question. Those who did attempt an answer found definition and justification of pressure groups difficult as they were mostly unsure who and what they were. There was some confusion between pressure groups and political parties. As a result of the misconceptions mentioned earlier, there were few detailed answers with any examples or evaluation of the methods used to achieve their aims. Greenpeace, Fathers for Justice, and animal rights groups were favourite choices.
- 7 This was an extremely popular question and yet, despite its 'common sense' element and travel being an essential ingredient of most people's everyday life, answers were disappointing. Some candidates outlined methods of tackling congestion that were hard to justify or had little effect. Environmental damage and global warming are side issues which formed the main body of some essays. Examiners were looking for tangible ways of tackling congestion – there were nine suggestions listed in the mark scheme – and were asking for consideration of their strengths and weaknesses. Such detailed discussion would point an essay towards the high mark bands. Too few candidates pursued this route and usually saw the method of tackling the problem from one side only.
- 8 Considering the mounting tension in the world between so many groups of people - whether politically, on religious grounds, or another reason - it was surprising how few candidates tackled this question. In fact, those that did attempt an answer chose some strangely remote and unusual groups to contrast and discuss. Sometimes generic and unnamed communities were chosen which made the awarding of credit difficult as these examples usually contained naive and sweeping assertions about the persons who lived there. Essentially, the terms tension and harmony were not sufficiently challenged. Better answers chose specific examples, such as the Middle East, and were therefore able to offer historical reasons for problems and current political difficulties in resolving them. The examples of harmony were often rather idealised and less well analysed than those of tension.

Summary points

- Examiners were delighted with the response to this new paper and the spirit and enthusiasm shown by candidates in answering a wide range of questions in two hours.
- Centres need to consider offering a plan to candidates that will enable them to complete a successful essay attempt in thirty minutes.
- Teachers might be advised to consult the specification and ensure that candidates are better prepared to answer questions that may appear concerning the arts.

Unit F732 The Scientific Domain

Introduction

This was the first sitting of this unit. The paper was 60 minutes in length and took the form shown in the specimen papers of having two sections. Section A included a series of relatively short compulsory questions. Section B offered candidates a choice of three questions of which they were expected to answer one.

The following general points emerged from the reports of the team of examiners marking this paper:

- responses displayed a motivated cohort with energy to respond to the questions set
- a significant number of candidates did not follow the rubric and opted to answer all of the questions in Section B
- only a very small number of candidates did not give their full effort to the production of answers.

Responses to individual questions

Section A

- 1 In this question candidates were expected to use their scientific skills to interpret the content of a poem. The poem chosen described the transformation in Science around 1700, as new ideas and methods challenged existing understanding. Most candidates were able to respond positively to the three questions set. If they had a weakness it was that they only considered part of the question. For example in Question 1(a) (ii) the candidates were asked to interpret the phrase 'became a scalpel to dissect'. Some candidates recognised either the metaphorical use of scalpel or dissect but did not explain the use of both words. Some, for example, described dissection as the opening up of topics and questions but unfortunately used the given word 'scalpel' rather than an explanatory word.

For the future, centres should encourage candidates to recognise all the parts of a phrase or question.

In this question marks were available for communication skills (AO4). It is pleasing to note that many candidates scored well in this aspect through their clear answers.

- 2 This question focused upon the mathematical skills and understanding of the candidates. There was an incline of difficulty through the question.

In the first part of the question candidates were asked to complete one row of Pascal's Triangle. Many candidates were able to do this, but found it a little more difficult to explain how they had reached their conclusion.

In Q2 (b) the candidates had to describe three patterns to be found on the diagonals of Pascal's Triangle. Candidates displayed a good deal of ingenuity in locating their patterns within the triangle. The most frequent mistake was to suggest that the diagonals leading to C and D represented the three times table.

Question 2(c) was the most challenging part of the question and a number of candidates were unable to score full marks. Most could understand the instructions for the calculation of Fibonacci Ratios but failed to observe the command to present their answers to two decimal places. Credit was given to candidates who recognised that the ratios 'went up and down' but few used the term convergence. Only a minority were able to score both marks for suggesting a convergence near to 1.62 to two decimal places.

Section B

Question three was by far the most popular question in this section. However examiners recognised that candidates with specific knowledge of models or environmental management tended to select questions 4 or 5 respectively.

There was a wide variation in the amount that candidates wrote in Section B. For some lower scoring candidates, a page of writing appeared to be their limit and so inevitably their answers lacked scope or development. Other candidates, having given full attention to Section A, were able to write well developed answers covering three or four sides of paper. Whilst length is not indicator of quality, these longer answers did tend to score more marks because of the ways in which they explored different aspects of the question. Centres may wish to give their candidates experience of writing at speed for a period of 30 minutes in a coherent and legible manner.

- 3 This was the most popular question in Section B. Candidates were invited to select a decade, from the seven given, that they felt most benefited the health of the population.

The 1990s was the most popular choice because of the importance given to the problems arising from HIV. Candidates were well informed on the HIV/AIDS position in Africa and of the threat the disease poses. They were also able to recognise the value the World Wide Web provides in terms of information and communication. Many were remarkably well informed on the various roles that Viagra can play.

Some candidates gave a little time to the rejection of other decades and this received credit. A small number of answers expressed reservations about their choice. (for example the negative effects that the World Wide Web has had on health). The reservations gained credit.

A small number of weaker candidates neglected the health focus required by the question and wrote in more general terms.

- 4 Those candidates selecting this question tended to do so because of their specific knowledge of one of the types of model. Some good answers were read.

Weaker candidates tended to repeat the information given with little to add to it. This was particularly the case with Statistical Models.

Good answers often selected Hardware Models and drew examples from architecture.

- 5 The candidates selecting this question clearly understood the quotation. They were able to select an environmental management problem and to explain why a proposed solution was perhaps simplistic. They then introduced a more complex solution and explained its merits. Environmental pollution and the use of finite resources to generate energy were popular themes. Complex solutions included recycling and the re-use of materials.

Report on the Units taken in January 2009

Less successful were candidates who proposed a solution that was speculative and currently beyond or at the edge of technology. Cars that were fuelled by water fell into this category.

Conclusion

This was the first time that this part of the specification had been examined. Many centres are to be congratulated on the candidates they presented for this paper. The candidates showed themselves well able to use their scientific and mathematical skills and knowledge to make appropriate responses to the questions set.

The number of candidates breaking the rubric in Section B suggests that some centres need to give a clear briefing to their entry before the summer examinations.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE General Studies (H079/H479)
January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
F731	Raw	120	91	81	71	62	53	0
	UMS	140	112	98	84	70	56	0
F732	Raw	60	46	41	36	31	26	0
	UMS	60	48	42	36	30	24	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Aggregation for the Advanced Subsidiary GCE is available from June 2009.

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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