GCE

Reports on the Units

January 2009

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Advanced GCE General Studies (7831)

Advanced Subsidiary GCE General Studies (3831)

REPORTS ON THE UNITS

Chief Examiner's Report

The six reports that follow detail the outcomes of the papers set in January 2009. From these reports a number of common themes arise. These are described in this introduction. There six general themes:

1   Centres are to be encouraged to review with candidates the key words in a question. A mistaken interpretation of a word can lead to an answer which moves away from the target of the question. This happened in unit 2961 with the interpretation of the word 'clique'.

2   Several papers included graphs of some sort during this sitting of the paper. In general candidates showed that they needed more experience in their interpretation of graphs. They should note the title of a graph, data source, the labels and units on the two axes and then consider the data that has been graphed.

3   In units 2964, 2966 and 2968 many candidates displayed a naïve view of the powers of the UK government and the ways in which the UK system of government works. Too often candidates appear to think the government is so powerful that it can fix all prices and arrange all outcomes. Attention to this problem is urgent, given that the new specification for General Studies has recently been launched.

4   When communicating an argument - for example, in favour of a change of law or behaviour - it is important that better candidates give attention to wider implications as well as its effects on others.

5   When questions are set in a General Studies paper the committee responsible for the evaluation of draft questions gives great attention the words used and the way they are structured. The question that appears on the final paper is intended to guide the candidate to the focus intended. It is important that candidates recognise this focus and then answer the question as set. Increased success in this respect may be achieved if centres increase the experience candidates have of question analysis.

6   At the end of each examination paper it is important that candidates proof read their answers. This can be crucial in that the absence of a key word can change meaning dramatically.

2961: The Cultural Domain

General Comments

Examiners concluded that the paper provided an appropriate challenge. There was a wide range of achievement and examiners reported positively on the level of commitment shown by candidates in furnishing full and positive responses to the questions. Short answer questions in Section A were suitably extended to produce good marks and the need for development and argument was acknowledged and tackled with some strength. In Section B there was a lack of sophistication in some of the essays which revealed the inexperience of the candidates and this lack of fluency and organisation, at times, hampered their chance of reaching the highest marks. The standard of time management was good and communication was satisfactory though the tendency continues to spell even the simplest of words incorrectly. Candidates must 'factor in' some time to review their work even if this is a short time before the end of the examination.

Comments on individual questions

Section A

1   This question proved to be interesting and accessible to most candidates, which enabled consideration of several aspects of each image. Most had no difficulty in recognising the creative and aesthetic aspects of graffiti and also how destructive it was to a community and how costly to remove. Equally good contrasts were made between the enjoyment, unity, and sense of bonding present in a football crowd pitched against racial abuse, drunkenness and hooliganism. The final image presented a difficulty in the sense that few candidates could find any negative views of joggers and cyclists. Indeed, some ignored the subject matter and talked about parks in general.

2   This proved to be an excellent discriminator. In part a) problems arose for candidates due to a lack of experience in interpreting verse. Consequently, words and meaning were not considered carefully and candidates had great difficulty in applying the generalist views of the poet to the specifics of High School cliques. Some interpreted worlds as 'countries' or 'social classes' though the most common approach was to give a pastiche of the words on the page. Many assertions were read about First and Third Worlds or about the rich and poor. There was clearly a need to read between the lines of the poem, which most candidates missed unless they were used to this kind of analysis. A minority did not know what a clique was and this caused problems in both parts of the question. Many candidates did, however, seem to understand the word clique in the context of part b) and produced some convincing accounts of cliques and their impact in education. However, there were a few who thought the word was 'clinic' or even 'cliché' which produced some interesting answers.

3   This question was quite well answered though some candidates strayed outside the UK for support for their ideas. However, there was some evidence of candidates struggling with what are abstract concepts of values and who thereby failed to give concrete interpretations and definitions of them. Some wrote little (less than 100 words) but other exceeded expectations by writing two or three pages, far too much for the time and marks available.

This invariably had an impact on Section B. Most chose 'equality' as their topic and wrote relevantly about the struggle to achieve it, often pointing out that the world was a long way from achieving it. The treatment of women and of ethnic minorities were good examples but many candidates felt aggrieved at being treated less fairly than adults in the case of wages. 'Honesty' was tackled by a smaller number who felt that it had declined over recent years, with the conduct of politicians over the Iraq War being a good example of dishonesty. 'Duty' was answered by few who generally felt it had declined in our time but was more relevant to past eras.

Section B

4   This was the least popular choice in Section B. In part a) there was a tendency not to understand that the question was about sources of belief and not individual beliefs. Others were able to identify religion, parents, peers, and personal experience as reliable and tangible sources of belief. In part b) answers varied greatly in quality from those who provided brief lists of practical activities in schools to those who recognised that the question required balanced and supported analysis with examples. There was much assertion that practical activity was the difference between good and bad lessons. There was ample scope here to unlock marks under assessment objective 4 by using personal experience as an important source of knowledge to support views on practical learning: many candidates missed this chance. P.E., Science, and Field Trips were the common examples used to support the idea that practical learning is best.

5   This question was a popular choice with many good answers. In part a) 'characteristics' were well-identified with many relevant examples of religion, dress, languages, and the cuisine of multi-cultural societies. In part b) some candidates repeated verbatim what they had used in part a). However, the more perceptive candidates argued that the UK as a whole benefited in terms of international relations with the country of origin of each ethnic minority. Many examples of co-operation in areas like Leicester were cited and also the conflicts in places like Bradford. It was also gratifying to see candidates discussing their friends who have other faiths and cultures and explaining what they had learned from them. There were some thoughtful and well-balanced responses that focused on cultural issues but many strayed deep into the economic sphere.

6   As has become expected of this examination, the media question attracted the most attention. Paparazzi seemed to be a term that most candidates were familiar with and they were able to refer to examples of intrusion, unscrupulousness and determination, and in doing so demonstrated an intimate knowledge of the popular press. Few recognised the positive notion that the paparazzi might be acting in the public interest and saw them as greedy, persistent, and even violent. Many took the term 'free press' in part b) to mean free newspapers. The benefits of free press proved elusive due to the difficulty in understanding its nature. Simply to write about the positive and negative stories which appeared was not enough to gain real credit and examiners saw many long descriptions of the lives of celebrities and how the press had ruined their careers. A few excellent candidates approached the question as being a choice between freedom and restriction and offered examples relating to the Iraq War and the current economic climate.

Summary points

- Candidates should be congratulated for the positive way in which they have approached the examination and produced some work of a high standard.

- Centres should ensure candidates have a good idea of the shape of an essay response and measure this against the time available.

- Candidates are encouraged to proof-read their work briefly in the remaining few minutes at the end of the examination.

2962: The Scientific Domain

General Comments

This was the penultimate sitting of Unit 2962. The examination paper proved to be appropriate for the ability range for which it is intended. Candidate performances spread across the mark range and within a wide section of the paper evenly balanced. Most candidates utilised their time well, seemingly apportioning an equal amount of time to each section; there were few rubric errors. It is still noticeable that the weakest candidates incorrectly attempt all three questions in section B.

Overall the quality of English was of quite a high standard with candidates giving time and thought to the construction of both essays and short answer questions. However although a minority found few difficulties with the calculations in question 1, the quality of mathematics left something to be desired.

Question 1

This question had electrical energy as its central theme. It moved from the calculation of electricity consumption and an electricity bill through to household energy conservation. Most candidates found this question more difficult than question 2.

(a) and **(b)** It was quite disappointing that a significant number of candidates found the multiplications and divisions needed for each part of this section too difficult. With or without a calculator about a quarter of the entry coped quite well with these sections.

(c) Fortunately this part was much better answered. Answers to (i) were quite varied and included variations in materials, exposed surface area, degrees of insulation and energy loss from different heat sources. Part (ii) was also quite well answered. Most candidates drew upon information in Table 1 and referred to important factors such as initial costs and payback periods.

The weaker responses came from candidates who did not give the question nor the information sufficient attention e.g. 'Using the data; select and justify' were often ignored. Consequently some candidates wrote about the qualities of different types of insulation and part (ii) answers often overlapped with part (i).

Question 2

The six conversations were seen as an interesting way of testing everyday knowledge of science. For most candidates the question worked well with the majority achieving at least 12 marks, and many well into the 20's. Although there were some elements of confusion most candidates attempted 5 of the 6 statements. They were clear about their identification of the misconception and to varying degrees of quality achieved an explanation. Although ideally these explanations could have included both sides of the conversation most answers dwelt upon the correct interpretation.

(i) As both the construction of electric cars and the generation of electricity for such cars require fossil fuels, Johns' view is correct. Due credit was however given to candidates who stated that where electricity is generated by renewable sources the use of fossil fuels might be reduced.

(ii) There were few difficulties with sleep, food and energy. Most answers dwelt on how the human body receives energy from food with some excellent descriptions of the breakdown of carbohydrates and protein. Very few candidates realised or stated that we still lose energy whilst asleep.

(iii) Whilst most candidates correctly referred to global warming enhanced by the release of greenhouse gases such as CO_2 and CH_4, far too many are still of the opinion the holes in the ozone layer let in heat thereby causing global warming; these are different processes occurring at different altitudes.

(iv) There were few problems with pointing out that sunscreen was needed due to high levels of uv and reflected radiation. Some thought it was because at altitude you are nearer to the sun, yet 2000metres is insignificant when compared with 93 million miles.

(v) There were few problems in this part; nearly all candidates recognised that Ed's father was incorrect. It was the quality of explanation that differentiated between candidates.

(vi) The majority of candidates correctly stated that hot summers are not due to the Earth being closer to the sun. Although most mentioned the Earth's seasons, very few related the Earth tilt of $23^1/_2 °$ causing a greater intensity of solar radiation during summer.

Section B

Questions 3 and 4 attracted similar numbers and question 5 was by far, the least popular.

Question 3

(a) Good answers were obtained from candidates who treated each line on the graph as a separate trend; this facilitated a description of a trend accompanied by a reason. Marks were often lost when candidates tried to combine the three trends into a general discussion. There were plenty of references to the accumulative effects of smoking, in particular due to tar and nicotine, but few mentioned carcinogens and the effects upon arteries.

(b) It was a little disappointing that many candidates confined their answers to alcohol and nicotine and then frequently generalised about illegal drugs. There was a small number of references to the common illegal drugs such as cannabis (skunk), cocaine, amphetamines and fewer mentioned legal 'off the counter' prescribed drugs such as paracetemol and codeine. Likewise few mentioned the use of drugs in sport.

The majority of candidates took the easiest route by stating that ill-health or deaths from legal drugs were greater due to accessibility, cost and greater usage. Illegal drugs being more expensive, in the spotlight of media attention and out of fear of being caught are less popular and numerically cause fewer deaths. Very few candidates questioned the statement in terms of percentages.

Question 4

This question was much better answered than question 3. Candidates engaged with both sections of the question, frequently dispelling the notion of there being insufficient time for lengthy Section B essays.

(a) Fig.3 proved to be effective in eliciting some relevant and sometimes lengthy answers. Most candidates gave the three modes of transport separate consideration and attached reasons to each. Strong support for cars contrasted with some quite disparaging criticisms of rail and bus transport. Upper band answers considered all three modes and weak responses either just concentrated on the trends in the graph or only considered one mode of transport.

(b) The context of this question lies in how developments in transport have facilitated the 'global village'. Most candidates expressed an understanding of the term global village from the word shrinking. Consequently there were some excellent descriptions of how improvements particularly in air transport, have reduced travel time. Discerning candidates then referred to multicultural societies and the internationalisation of business and industry. Most answers expressed support for the notion of a global village.

Unfortunately very few candidates drew upon various barriers to international travel such as cost, visas and linguistic difficulties. The weakest responses hardly mentioned the world shrinking to a global village and more or less repeated the detail of part (a). A small number had little idea and referred to village transport issues.

Question 5

Although not a very popular question it was well answered. Candidates clearly made a positive and secure decision to answer question 5 in preference to 3 and 4.

(a) The qualities of scatter graphs with line of best fit in revealing trends, exposing anomalies and the strength of a correlation in a clear visual form was accurately described. Some candidates even suggested that the fairly narrow dispersal of data would be expected from an athletics club.

(b) Many candidates seemed to be in familiar territory with this question on the accuracy of statistical information. Many essays contained lots of exemplar material mentioning how people can both trust and distrust statistical information. Commercial and business statistics (often using media advertising) were deemed less trustworthy than those on health. Some candidates expressed support for government statistics, whilst others were more sceptical.

In the main good quality answers can be differentiated from weak answers by a combination of the length and structure of the essay combined with the use of exemplar material.

Conclusion

Overall this science domain paper proved to be an effective test. Candidates engaged well with the paper and wrote some informed and most interesting essays.

2964: The Social Domain 1

General comments

Examiners agreed that the level of difficulty of the paper was appropriate and felt that candidates responded in a positive way to the questions. A significant number scored marks above eighty percent with fewer in the range below thirty five percent. Examiners also reported that there were very few 'minimalist' scripts' or responses where the candidate had made no effort. In the same vein there were few reported cases of rubric infringement. Centres are to be congratulated on their preparation of candidates for this paper.

Section A

This section consisted of two questions with an allocation of fifty marks. The first question was allocated thirty six marks and focused on unemployment. Question 2, worth fourteen marks, invited candidates to explain how they would carry out an investigation in health provision. Many candidates scored well in the seven tasks that formed question one. However many did less well with the investigation that formed question two. This is disappointing given that this type of question has been a frequent feature of this paper

1 (a) (i) This question required a definition of the title of Fig. 1 'Working age employment rate'. Some candidates launched directly into an interpretation of the graph and scored few marks. Those that concentrated on the definition did well though there were some unusual ideas about the scope of 'working age'.

(ii) In this question candidates had to suggest a reason for the difficulty in measuring 'unemployment rate'. Successful candidates focused upon the informal economy, payment in cash and benefit fraud. Less successful were candidates who wrote in more general terms about the difficulties in measuring large numbers. There were also helpful references to illegal immigrants and migrant gangs.

(iii) In this question the candidates had to compare the trends shown by two graphs. Many were able to state the trends but failed to extend to their answers to include comparisons. Some extraneous reference was made to the 'credit crunch' though the graphs largely predated the recession.

(iv) This question asked candidates to examine the mismatch between increasing job vacancies and a relatively high unemployment rate. Many candidates showed good understanding of this paradox and scored full marks. A small number vented ire on benefit scroungers.

(v) In this question the candidates had to suggest two ways in which the government might reduce unemployment rates. Rather tough suggestions included cutting benefits, labour gangs for public works and conscription. However many more successful candidates saw beyond this to the re-stimulation of the economy by fiscal means, retraining and careers advice. Many scored full marks perhaps reflecting the current economic climate and debate.

(b) (i)This question asked for a 50 word précis of a Department for Work and Pensions Press Release. Despite the challenges in the press release many candidates scored full marks. Less successful candidates found difficulty in limiting their answer and in some cases wrote a piece even longer than the press release.

(ii)   Responses to this question showed good understanding of why some interest groups would oppose the press release statement. However a minority of candidates did interpret 'interest' groups as being banks or 'loan sharks'.

2   This question focused upon an investigation into the efficiency of a local health centre. On the whole the responses to this question were poor. Very few candidates included any preparation or analysis of data but concentrated exclusively on methods. This was both surprising and disappointing given the number of times this type of question has appeared on this paper.

Most candidates mentioned some type of patient survey involving questionnaires, there was much uncritical measuring of waiting times. Candidates also suggested armies of undercover patients with mystery illnesses being deployed to test diagnostic skills. Except in a few praiseworthy cases there was no hint that investigators would not be able to go through patient records at will. Cleanliness was perceived as an issue but few ideas were expressed on how it might be tested.

Section B

3   Very few candidates answered this question. Those selecting it usually did well. Question 3(b) is a regular topic on General studies papers and yet candidates appear confused by the concept of a referendum. There was mention of local referenda on transport issues but few appeared to have knowledge of the 1975 European referendum on UK membership. Some confused a referendum with a General Election.

4   In the first part of this question candidates had to explain the political phrases 'moving to the right' and 'moving to the left'. Most candidates were able to differentiate between the two phrases. Some candidates rather oversimplified them with suggestions that 'left is communism' and 'right is fascism'. However a pleasing number included issues on economic policy, personal freedom and state intervention.

In part (b) the candidates had to assess the advantages and disadvantages of political parties having a long time in government. Most saw the advantages in terms of stability and long term policy making. Disadvantages included complacency or arrogance and a resulting tendency to corruption. Many candidates put forward the idea that four or five years is too long without a chance of change. A small number of candidates suggested alternating government of left and right 'to give everyone a fair chance'.

A few candidates were sidetracked into governments in such countries as Zimbabwe and dictatorships from the past. More successful were a number of detailed, well reasoned and exemplified answers which ranged over a set of representative governments.

5   In part (a) a wide variety of positive reasons was given for the use of the train to travel to Paris from London. As alternatives road and air travel were given negatives. Many candidates were able to score high marks on this question.

The question in part (b) was highly structured and candidates were able to take full advantage of this. Some very good answers were read. Five ways in which private car use might be reduced were offered. All five featured in candidate selections. The reduction in the number of car parking spaces had the least support. A wide range of justifications was suggested both for accepting and rejecting a plan. Financial reasons figured strongly in the reasoning.

Congestion charges were seen as useful, though there was evidence of uncertainty among some candidates about how they operated, and in particular their effect upon residents within the congestion zone. Some candidates professed ignorance of Park and Ride schemes.   A small number of candidates did not understand the term 'subsidising'.

This was a popular and successful question that stimulated detailed and thoughtful responses. Candidates are clearly at their strongest when dealing with matters in their direct and immediate experience.

2965: The Scientific & Cultural Domains

Introduction

The paper followed its usual format with three questions focusing on the Scientific Domain and three on the Cultural Domain. Once again candidates were asked to answer one question from each section. The following general points emerged:

- Examiners were pleased to note the energy and motivation that candidates brought to the examination
- Many examiners remarked on the development that candidates exhibit during their time in years 12 and 13 such that many are able to produce two well written developed pieces
- Some examiners suggested that the scripts they had read indicated that the candidates had clearly enjoyed the paper and the challenges it had presented to them
- There were very few rubric errors
- In some examples the fluency and sophistication of language was a joy to read but for far too many candidates their command of language lagged behind their general level of understanding
- That the world of candidates focuses very much around their own times and life experiences and that the achievements of previous centuries often count little to them, compared to the progress being made in their own lifetimes.

Comments on individual questions

Section A

1   This was the most popular question in Section A.   Candidates were asked to describe a different positive effect of information technology on four areas. They were also asked to identify two negative impacts of information technology on one of these areas.

    Candidates were able to follow these instructions and provide some information for all six challenges. Better candidates were able to develop their answers in each of the areas. The most challenging was, of course, sea navigation. However it is pleasing to report the imagination shown by candidates in their development of answers towards each of the specified areas.

    Some candidates made good use of their experiences in part-time employment to develop good answers with considerable scope in terms of a retail store. Others showed they had a very up to date knowledge of the ways in which the health service and doctor's surgeries in particular are using information technology.

    Perhaps the weakest part of the answers came in the identification of two negative impacts. Some weaker candidates drifted away from information technology in this part whilst others were unable to suggest anything other than power cuts. Clearly the availability of emergency supplies and generators to hospitals is not well known.

2   This was the least popular question in this section yet it produced some fine answers. It was pleasing to read the text as the candidates' minds struggled with the dilemmas and paradoxes of responsibility. All appeared to go well if the outcomes of scientific work were positive. Problems arose when there were also negative aspects. Few wrestled with modern day ethical issues.

    Less pleasing was the fact that this question appeared to be the refuge for some weaker candidates.

Some mentioned the problems of provenance when work was the culmination of a team over many years, whilst others noted the different aspects stemming from the development of atomic science.

Weaker candidates adopted a simplistic approach by stating that, of course, scientists should be responsibly since it was their work. There appeared to be little recognition that the scientist, at times, had little control over the public's recognition of their responsibility.

Examiners noted that many candidates appeared to see scientists as working in isolation. They failed to give due regard to other stakeholders who may be key parts of the research and development process. These could include manufacturers and politicians.

3   This question focused upon the work of scientists in aiding the UK to a more sustainable future. Clearly most candidates had some idea of a definition of sustainability. These varied from the usually accepted version involving the use of resources today without prejudice to the needs of future generation to the less ambitious one of suggesting continuation of existing activity e.g. the sustainability of a village such that it existed in the future. Both of these definitions were accepted by examiners. It is pleasing to note that some candidates gave an explicit definition at the beginning of their essay.

The popular suggestions included more recycling, greater use of a more efficient and reliable public transport, the introduction of renewable energy sources and the inclusion of energy saving devices in buildings. Less successful were the candidates who looked to scientists to invent the car that ran on water, hydrogen power and other rather speculative thoughts for the future.

The key challenge of this question came after the candidates had stated the strengths and weaknesses of their proposals. The question asked for an assessment of the relative balance of strengths and weaknesses. Better candidates were able to offer this type of assessment.

Section B

4   This was a popular question in some centres and examiners report that many high scoring answers were read.

In this question candidates were given a proclamation by St Paul. They were asked to match this to the central ideas of one religion of their choice. At the end of the question the candidates had to describe two circumstances when it is difficult to work towards the ideal stated by St Paul.

The majority of candidates selected Christianity as their chosen religion. Good answers were also received from candidates selecting Islam, Hinduism and Quakerism.

In the first part of the question the candidates were expected to make matches between the statements of St Paul and their chosen religion. Though many were able to offer the tenets of their choice they found it more difficult to make the match with St Paul. This may have been, in part, due to a rather narrow interpretation of such words as 'freedom' and 'equality'.

There were many pleasing examples in the second part of the question. Many candidates had clearly given thought to the issues arising from the adoption of particular religious principles in today's world. The general view appeared to be that the difficulties arose because of the passage of time since the formulation of the religious tenets. As a result these tenets tended to be out of line with modern life. Some candidates suggested that a revision of the tenets could make religions more attractive.

Most difficulties focused on equality particularly as it related to gender. This was frequently described within the world of work and the concepts of equal pay and the 'glass ceiling'. Some candidates, writing from an Islamic perspective, wrote with vigour about the misconceptions in the general public about the equality of women.

5   This was the most popular of the Section B questions and in some ways the responses were the least satisfactory.

In the question candidates were asked to select one of the ten creative areas listed in the specification. They were to make their selection on the criterion that the chosen area best represented life in the UK at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Examiners anticipated that candidates would describe some characteristics of life in the UK at that time and then show how their chosen field reflected them. Alternative it was expected that the candidates might describe a characteristic of say twenty-first century music and then link it to life in the UK. It was rare that either of these paths was used.

Candidates made their choice of one area but then set out to describe its characteristics. Often they gave many examples particularly in the field of music. For example a candidate might describe, with examples, rap music and various new styles from the current array of music genres from youth culture. However what they usually failed to do was to link these features to everyday life. Thus they presented an up to date picture of music but with no link to the focus of the question. In many answers the link could be detected as implied. The characteristics expected included such headings as affluence, multiculturalism, mobility, debt, internationalism and globalisation. All of these could have been explicitly linked to their chosen creative field.

Some candidates chose architecture and cited the London Eye, Millennium Dome and Wembley Stadium as representative of life at the beginning of the twenty-first century. There was great potential here but few were able to realise it because of their lack of experience in interpreting buildings as representing a particular time.

The second part of the question called for an explanation of why, for different reasons, one of the other areas was rejected. Sculpture and poetry were the most regular choices. The reasons given were usually in terms of lack of popularity, low profile, limited commercialism and a characterisation with the past. Sadly the candidates suggested that the theatre is a venue only for the more affluent, that with busy lives no one reads novels and that poetry is outmoded and should take greater notice of rap music.

6   The final question on the paper focused on creativity. Examiners read some enthusiastic responses which appeared to come from candidates with a link to creative arts subjects. In general a wide variety of ways to greater creativity was described with imagination and invention. These included role models, praise from teachers, competitions and joining others in groups.

The second part of the question asked the candidates to move from creativity to innovation. This proved challenging for many. It was interesting to see the high profile given to the television programme 'Dragon's Den'. Candidates saw the support the 'Dragon' could give as the way to innovation. Other suggested more government grants for good ideas. Some good answers were drawn from the world of world where a creative suggestion was taken up by an enlightened employer and the individual allowed to innovate.

In general the poor quality of responses to the innovation part of the answer tended to leave answers rather unbalanced.

Conclusions

Centres are to be congratulated on the great majority of answers produced by their candidates. Many high scoring scripts were read with pleasure. On the other hand some examiners did comment that a small number of candidates did appear to have little to offer when faced with the challenges presented in an A2 paper.

Centres may wish to brief their candidates on the need to deconstruct a question to ensure that they have answered all of its various parts.

Centres may also wish to encourage candidates to think of the ways in which they develop their ideas. This could be through an elaboration of points already made. Alternatively development can take place through widening the scope of an answer, including examples or contra points or reservations that may or may not be drawn from personal experience.

Some low scoring answers were relatively brief. Centres may wish to induct candidates into their full use of the time available.

Examiners noted that often the high scoring answers were well structured and followed the plan offered by the question. In this sitting of the examination it was noted that there had been a marked improvement in the structure of answers.

2966: The Social Domain 2

Section 1 - General Comments

Examiner colleagues all felt that the examination was set at an appropriate level of difficulty, that this was a successful paper, and that candidates had engaged with it well. It was pleasing to note that taking the cohort as a whole the optional questions were chosen in roughly equal numbers, although question 2 was both the least popular and often the least well answered.

The presentation of candidates' work was also often praiseworthy. One colleague commented that "the National Curriculum's emphasis on literacy over a sustained period continues to show good effects in the quality of basic expression in the scripts". Another concurred with this view but also noted that the possessive apostrophe continues to be underused, and that many otherwise sound candidates seemed to have little idea about paragraphing. At the same time the quality of candidates' handwriting seemed very variable, although no scripts were actually indecipherable.

The quality of work produced by different centres continues to differ markedly. It would appear that Centres where candidates receive structured and focused teaching continue to perform much better than candidates from centres where preparation for the examination is limited or non-existent. In particular many candidates seemed to be largely untutored in terms of knowing how to address a General Studies examination question. This presented difficulties for them as they composed their responses. Question 3 provided much evidence for this point of view. It cannot be said too often that a General Studies paper will never be accessible to a candidate possessed only of intelligence and a fluent pen. A secure knowledge base is needed along with these, as well as sound examination technique. Candidates need to be able to read a question analytically, determining precisely what is being asked of them. Ascertaining this will, as often as not, provide a structure for the answer.

That said, all the questions set seemed to achieve the intended differentiation, and no candidates appeared to have had difficulty with timing. There was a small number of rubric infringements. It was felt, finally, that a there was a good balance of choice between the optional questions, such that candidates were offered genuine opportunities to show what they knew, understood and could do in terms of the syllabus.

Section Two - Comments on Individual Questions

Question One

This was a very accessible question that differentiated extremely well. One colleague noted that it was a real pleasure to read the responses to it. In the past, candidates have shown reluctance to challenge the source in questions like these, but in this instance many of them did. The indignation felt by some candidates at what they saw as an unjustified attack on the middle-class was strong in some instances. But whilst making a critique of the source could be a legitimate and fruitful tactic for the most able candidates, many who attempted this were less able. Their critiques often reduced to asserting that either it was wrong to focus only on the criminality of one social group or that the authors had misused the data and had a class agenda of their own to pursue. They tended to let this dominate their arguments to the exclusion of a business-like consideration of the available evidence of middle class criminality.

Many candidates did offer an analysis of the motives of middle class criminals, although it was surprising how many actually seemed to be representing these as reasonably justifiable. One colleague noted that it was disappointing, even disturbing, to see students justifying illegal acts – crimes, in fact – for spurious, even bogus reasons.

Most candidates found little difficulty in assembling a range of reasons behind white- collar crime, but it was the ability to write critically about the *justifications* for these reasons that was the mark of a good candidate. Some also managed to incorporate sociological/philosophical views to substantiate their repudiation of typical middle class justifications.

A very pleasing feature of the response to this question was the very large number of candidates achieving a Band 3 level – a fact confirming the question's accessibility to a very wide range of ability levels. Many Band 3 answers worked through the source methodically and were able to use it as a tool for some competent analysis.

The question differentiated most sharply in its third limb – the drawing of conclusions. Very few candidates were able to draw many conclusions. Many relied on either conclusions found in the original source or conclusions based on a simplistic critique of its validity. The best answers often incorporated sociological and philosophical views in their conclusions to substantiate their repudiation of typical middle class justifications as well as to reinforce the notion that the law is the law, and that crime is crime, no matter who commits it.

Question Two

Rather more candidates than might have been expected interpreted this question in very personal terms. They wrote about what an individual might attempt to do to set an example in everyday life, rather than exploring the methodology of attempting to exercise political and other pressures through avenues such as petitioning, political parties, pressure groups, and community groups.

Obviously many candidates did take the wider view but a further weakness then tended to emerge - a lack of focus on assessing the effectiveness, or indeed the potential effectiveness, of such activity. The result was that many answers were significantly incomplete in that respect.

Some wrote about changing society as if it were an individual act – such as doing kind deeds, collecting litter, being nice to people. Some candidates devoted whole answers to such considerations. Needless to say the discussion on effectiveness was very limited, if attempted at all.

Other responses were unable to describe or classify the action that might be taken. For example, one answer described working in a neighbourhood to help solve crime. In fact it was describing campaigning on the issue but seemed unable to recognise this.

More successful answers were able to identify clear actions such as campaigns, demonstrations, strikes, petitions, pressure groups and political lobbying. The most common examples cited were *Fathers for Justice*, the Iraq war demonstrations, the campaign against the Huntington Life Sciences laboratories and the miners' strikes during the Thatcher government. The best answers often used personal knowledge. One candidate wrote compellingly of work with a pressure group against vivisection and ably differentiated legal from illegal methods, noting that whilst the latter attracted more attention they actually harmed the cause they intended to promote.

The second half of the question was less successfully addressed. Most understood the value of publicity; some understood the need to put pressure on the government, the necessity for getting large numbers of people behind the cause and the use of celebrities to bring the issues to a wider audience.

Examiners felt that answers to this question showed the limitations, in terms of political experience, of some of this generation. In addition examiners felt that a narrow range of topical

knowledge was also a problem, leading some candidates into a discursive and rhetorical polemic about our "broken society". Such answers were usually hard to credit.

It was evident that some candidates saw this question as a "soft" one, which could be answered in the most general of terms. This can only be a consequence of a misreading of the question, and a failure to appreciate that there is no such thing as an easy A-level General Studies question. Apparent simplicity always conceals complexity and only a careful deconstruction of the question will unlock this.

Question Three

The reference above to candidates addressing a question arises from the responses to this question. Candidates were asked to address a hypothetical situation in which voluntary euthanasia [as distinct from mercy-killing and assisted suicide] would be legal. They were then required to cite, analyse and discuss the legal, ethical and practical issues that would be involved in such a legalisation.

Candidates who read the question successfully and succinctly had, by doing this, a complete essay plan at their fingertips to which they could apply their knowledge base, their analytical skills and their understanding – "to show what they knew, understood and could do in terms of the syllabus".

Unfortunately, a significant minority of those who attempted this question – by a considerable margin the most popular – did not spend long enough reading and analysing the question, with the result that their answers lacked knowledge, understanding and focus.

Many candidates wrote about euthanasia and really were discussing various forms of euthanasia, such as mercy-killing, instead of defining and discussing 'voluntary euthanasia'. This meant that their answers frequently could not rise above the 'limited' range of marks. Equally many also decided that this was an invitation to re-visit the pros and cons of voluntary euthanasia at a purely theoretical level or as a prelude to announcing that they disapproved of the idea.

Some hovered on the edge of relevance by interweaving a critique of voluntary euthanasia with some relevant observations on what impact it would have in the three nominated areas.

Happily, a majority did interpret the question correctly and in some cases provided sensitive, knowledgeable and well-analysed responses. As one colleague put it, "candidates who freed themselves from the constraints of arguments *for* and *against* often wrote complex and detailed responses which addressed, intelligently and sometimes movingly, the issues which would face a society in which voluntary euthanasia was legal".

It was evident too that some centres had taught this topic, as references to Diane Pretty, Daniel James, Craig Ewart and the Swiss organisation *Dignitas* showed. In fact this turned out to be a somewhat double-edged advantage. Where candidates could adapt their knowledge to use it in support of their discussion this often produced competent, not to say complex answers. Some candidates however simply unloaded their information into their answers without processing it, leading them into answering a different question from the one they had been asked.

It is the ability to **use** knowledge, rather than regurgitate it, which characterises the best candidates in this subject. *Assessment Objective 4* in the mark scheme refers to awareness of the differences between, and the limitations of different types of knowledge. In effect it obliges candidates to calculate the relevance of what they know to the question they have been asked. This in turn requires them carefully to deconstruct the question so that they can be sure of this.

In asking questions of this kind it is never the intention of examiners to trick candidates, but it is regrettable that candidates in effect trick themselves by making such cursory evaluations of the task they have been set. Time spent in considering the question fully is *never* wasted.

Question Four

Many candidates offered quite sensitive and informative answers to this question, which was thought by most colleagues to be the most successfully answered.

Most candidates were able to define a multicultural community, explain its likely characteristics and then proceed to discuss the degree to which Britain fitted this description. There was a great deal about foreign cuisine, wider religious observance, the celebration of overseas fashions and national festivals. Candidates' worked with both the visible and the conceptual, often with shrewd critique of some visible aspects. "I don't eat lamb bhuna with mushroom pilau because I want to connect with the Asian community. I eat it because I'm hungry and I like the taste."

It was heartening to read not only clearly evidenced belief that Britain was seen as a successful multicultural community, but also a considered and measured critique of where this was not working. Considerable numbers of candidates offering such critiques wrote objectively about multicultural dysfunction, ascribing it to innate conservatism or the insularity of more rural parts of the host community. It was also good to see the agenda of such groups as the British National Party subjected to evaluation often founded in personal experience – "the cricket team I play for in the summer is like Nelson Mandela's Rainbow Nation, and the only time we fall out is when someone muffs a catch".

The 'to what extent' part of the question was similarly addressed with some success, including mature assessments of the continued existence of racism in society and its malign influence in some areas on multiculturalism. It came as a great relief to note that whilst there were several critiques of multiculturalism, these were couched in reasonable terms that often made telling references to the more extreme aspects of political correctness. In general candidates exhibited a much more liberal and tolerant stance than has been the case with questions on similar topics in the past.

Large numbers of proposals were put forward for further action to develop Britain's position, often expressed in very optimistic terms of how the younger generation would achieve greater enjoyment of multiculturalism in the future. Some of these tended to naivety, not least because of overconfidence – noted before in many connections – in what government action can achieve by fiat, as opposed to initiating and encouraging more gradualist changes in society.

But on the whole candidates enjoyed answering the third part and there were many thoughtful suggestions. Many of them showed awareness of the fact that a process was unfolding that might need careful and patient handling. Very few responses were against multiculturalism, and many examiners felt that the question had allowed candidates to take stock of their everyday reality and seriously assess this aspect of our society. Many also looked at the negatives [eg racism] in society and incorporated it into their analysis.

The answers to this question were encouraging both in social and academic terms. Their quality in general confirmed both the engagement of candidates with the question and their informed interest in it.

2968: Culture, Science and Society: Making Connections

General Comments

As has become normal in January, the paper attracted a relatively small entry to that of June - a little over 1500 candidates. Examiners were somewhat perplexed by the general standard of work they saw and offer two conclusions. Firstly, it is proposed that this was a weaker group of candidates than one would expect in the summer and as a consequence they found the subject matter, sources, and questions too difficult. Secondly, there is a case for suggesting that this group lacked preparation for the examination in that there was clear evidence to confirm that some did not understand the concept of Making Connections or synoptic essay writing. In the case of both questions the candidates seemed to encounter difficulties in accessing the knowledge that was required for a successful attempt at questions, coupled with weaknesses in the ability to communicate a response in a logical, organised, and appropriate way.

It is a requirement that candidates consider and explore each of the domains in response to the questions. This may be done directly or discreetly. There is no need, and in fact it is sometimes a hindrance, to allocate separate paragraphs for the discussion of each domain. The model which Centres should consider is shown in *figure 1* below where there may be links between some or all of the domains to a greater or lesser extent.
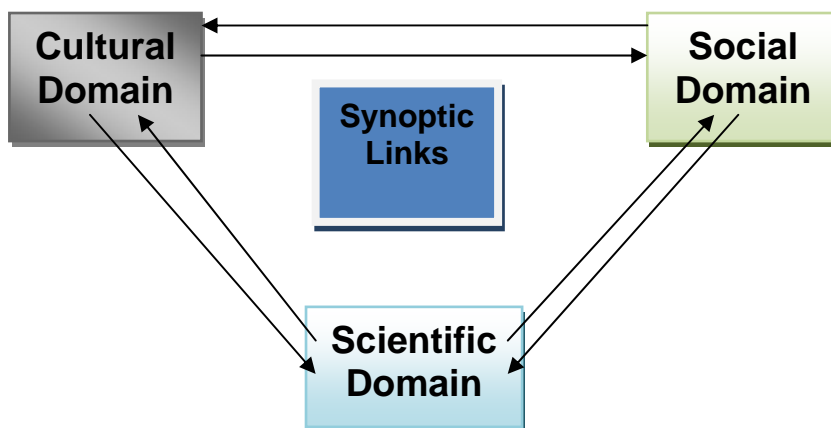
Sometimes it is not practical to incorporate a detailed reference to a certain domain as it is not directly connected but does feature in a more discrete way. In previous sessions it appeared that candidates found it difficult to incorporate successfully the scientific domain: this January a very pleasing aspect was candidates' inclusion of scientifically relevant observations. This was particularly evident in responses to question 2 where one might have expected some difficulties given that the topic would have elicited art criticism and nothing else.

Examiners continue to be concerned about the general standard of English and essay construction as well as the absence of effective time management. Many essays lacked a cogent shape and direction; some candidates reached a point where they found a comfort zone and steered the essay in one direction, forgetting the constraints in the question and the synoptic approach required. In addition, candidates rarely extended their ideas beyond the sources and, in some cases simply wrote descriptively and discursively. On occasion, examiners were delighted to see thoughtful, balanced and considered responses that looked at both sides of an issue and provided constructive and critical ideas before offering their own personal view as a conclusion. In these cases, examiners found no difficulty in awarding very good marks and positive comments for work of a very high standard.

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Finally, it is important for Centres to inform candidates that the Sources provided are there to help them construct an interesting response; they are not to be treated as an English comprehension passage. They are provided to inspire, invoke, and involve the candidate in a subject of controversy and current interest, as a catalyst for cogent, balanced and articulate argument. Centres are reminded that only 12 marks out of 50 are available for knowledge and description whereas the development of ideas and argument accounts for 32 marks. The brevity of some answers precluded candidates from scoring marks any higher than Band 4 (11-20 marks) due to the limited nature of their response.

Comments on individual questions

Section A

1   The question asked candidates to do three things: discuss the statement given; make connections between the domains and consider and explain ways in which the turnout of voters at elections may be increased. The two sources offered background information that could be used to support and supplement candidates' arguments. For example, Source 1 gave some background information about voting and touched on important key issues such as a reduction in the power of the vote, social change, the lack of voice for minority groups and suggestions of inequality in our society. In Source 2 the passage served as a catalyst to provoke a reaction to electronic voting.

In was clear to examiners that there was a distinct lack of knowledge and appreciation of the UK's electoral system. Many used the sources for purely descriptive and discursive purposes rather than to referring to them in support or criticism of a line of argument. Therefore, generally the essays on this subject tended to be lacking in any critical exploration of the implications inherent in the sources. In examining ways to increase turnout at elections a number of candidates chose to make a list of as many ideas as possible without any explanation. Similarly there was almost universal acceptance of any electronic system being by far the most efficient one. There was a need, in both cases, for careful examination of each premise, pointing out strengths and weaknesses and posing any dilemmas which voters (or indeed Political Parties) might face. This would trigger marks under assessment objectives 3 and 4 which account for the main proportion of marks available for the question.

The idea of proportional representation being introduced as a way of decreasing inequality and catering for minorities was rarely cited. When this was discussed, the candidate was usually well-informed and the response was of the highest quality. These candidates examined other forms of voting system in a quest to find a successful way of improving voter turnout.

Examples of connections include:

- the electronic system is flawed (science) and open to corruption by the unscrupulous (social)
- minority groups in our culturally diverse society (culture) feel excluded due to lack of education and knowledge (social)
- we live in a democracy (culture) but by promoting the vote or making it compulsory we are, in effect, becoming a more oppressive nation (social).

Section B

1   Examiners were pleased with the even-handed and balanced approach which many candidates took to this question. The images provided plenty of stimulation for a wide range of ideas to be proposed that looked at both the positive and negative views of Public Art. There was some discussion as to what Public Art is: work 'owned' by and paid for from the public purse or art celebrating a public place or event or, more commonly, art sited outdoors to benefit the general public. Examiners adopted an open mind, taking each proposition on its own merits but remembering the thrust and interpretation of the four images given as a stimulus.

Generally, the question performed well and there were many useful connections made to support this :

- street art like graffiti (culture) being used as a form of communication (social) was common with a number of candidates referring to Banksy's work
- the construction of the work and its materials (science) celebrates the success of a community (culture) and creates more tourism and generates wealth (social)
- candidates' interpretation of each of the images enabled many connections to be made though some were rather tenuous.

A successful answer would involve reference to the sources but also the inclusion of other examples of public art as further support or as a comparison to the argument being posed. For example, the relationship between *The Angel of the North*, and its success, and *Another Place*, Antony Gormley's human sculptures that were removed from Crosby Beach, Merseyside. This gave the opportunity to explore both the positive and negative views of Public Art as perceived by the *public* rather than to simply castigate any person who considers the works to be of value and importance as being 'art snobs' and 'posh people'- the only members of the public who value the art. This limited mindset is a serious handicap to candidates hoping to reach the higher mark bands in this examination.

Finally, one final matter to highlight is that of overstatement. It is quite impractical to make the idea that Public Art poses a serious threat to the environment a key component of an essay though it is accepted the *B of the Bang* has serious health and safety issues connected with its construction as pieces keep falling from it. This is just one small part of the larger picture which can be highlighted but only in relation to reality and its connection to an example.

Summary points

- Centres are clearly aware of the importance of the three domains of General Studies and should be congratulated for this step towards securing the integrity of the Making Connections examination.
- Candidates need to explore more points of view and lines of enquiry before launching a conclusion to their essay. This will ensure balance and open up the possibility of scoring more marks for assessment objectives 3 and 4.
- There is a distinct lack of knowledge of electoral systems and processes and Centres would do well to revisit this section of the specification.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE General Studies (3831/7831)
January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
2961	Raw	100	69	61	53	45	37	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2962	Raw	100	64	56	49	42	35	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2964	Raw	100	71	64	58	52	46	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2965	Raw	100	72	64	56	48	41	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2966	Raw	100	65	59	53	47	42	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2968	Raw	100	56	50	45	40	35	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
3831	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7831	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

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

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3831	6.7	21.1	45.8	69.2	87.4	100.0	2261
7831	7.6	26.1	51.3	76.7	93.1	100.0	974

3235 candidates aggregated this series.

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.