

General Studies

Advanced GCE A2 H479

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H079

Examiners' Reports

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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 Report

Overview

This introduction draws out views that are held in common by the Principal Examiners of all the four General Studies units. These senior examiners felt that the majority of candidates had been well prepared for the examination. The scripts demonstrated that the great majority of candidates approached the examination with energy and application.

The following are common themes that emerged.

Candidates showed a positive approach towards the examination and considerable skill in thinking and reasoning their way to sound answers.

There is a concern that candidates do not always differentiate in terms of the time they allocate to some questions and their answers. The responses to questions carrying a low tariff in terms of the marks available were often far too long. A candidate often gained full marks within the first six or seven lines of their answer but went on to write much more. This often meant that later questions worth many more marks were rushed and incomplete, thus seriously affecting the final marks awarded.

In Unit 734 there was a specific concern that the first of the two compulsory questions received far more attention than the second. Since these questions carry equal weighting, candidates need to balance their time allocation more evenly and not neglect their second answer.

General Studies is a demanding field in that candidates need to demonstrate competence across the three domains of Culture, Science and Society. Of these the Cultural Domain is the most neglected and, in particular, those questions demanding knowledge of the Arts. For many candidates the Arts appear confined to topics with which they engage in everyday life. These usually include the popular media, the use of electronic entertainment and personal communication devices. Clearly the fine arts, sculpture, theatre, music (other than 'pop') and the written word have a low profile in the experience of many students. Centres are encouraged to devote some time to broadening their candidates' experience of the Arts when designing future General Studies courses. Musical theatre, for example, often explores social and personal issues in a fashion calculated to appeal to a wide audience.

Many candidates enrich their answers by drawing out concepts and beliefs from their own experience. This is to be applauded. However some candidates do not develop this beyond the anecdotal, whilst others include no supporting material from this area. Candidates can readily enrich their answers in this way and Centres should seek to engage their candidates with this approach. One strategy would be to offer extracts from autobiographies and diaries, where a great mind draws out new insights from particular experience.

All the questions in a General Studies examination are carefully structured by a team of experts. The tasks are specific and targeted. If there are two or three tasks then marks are made available for each task. Centres are encouraged to work with their candidates on the deconstruction of questions in order to recognise the various components in the question.

One of the more demanding and differentiating challenges in General Studies questions lies in the use of the phrase 'To what extent . . .'. At AS level it might appear as 'To what extent do you agree that...'. In these circumstances the candidate should realise that there are points in favour of and against a viewpoint or assertion. They are being asked where they feel the balance lies between these two conflicting positions. At A2 the challenge is greater, with perhaps three positions available. For example, 'To what extent should the decision lie with the patient, the professional or the family?'. In this case, there is an area between the three positions where the candidate's argument needs to be located. In view of the frequent use of the phrase 'to what extent' it is suggested that Centres may want to pose dilemmas and scenarios that that candidates might explore to find their own stance and location.

F731 The Cultural and Social Domains

General Comments

It is pleasing to note that the entry for this component has remained stable and that the large majority of candidates are approaching the examination in a positive and mature way. General Studies is a subject that promotes the abilities of thinking and reasoning. This is demonstrated through a range of questions that promote different engagement skills: the efficient organisation and arrangement of short answers and the more sustained and sophisticated techniques employed in the presentation of an essay. Overall, candidates rose enthusiastically to these challenges and confirmed the belief that the integrity and quality of the specification was secure. Centres are apparently allocating more time to prepare candidates for the examination, a development that recognises that General Studies is a nationally recognised qualification of some importance to stand alongside candidates' core Advanced level subject choices.

In Sections A and C, candidates understood the principle of supporting points with reasoned development, accompanying information or debate, in order to gain full marks. These Sections provide a challenge by demanding an adept synthesis of ideas, presented effectively and succinctly. An issue that has arisen in this session is the excessive length of some answers to questions in Sections A and C where only a small number of marks are available. This disables a candidate from spending enough time planning the more extensive answers required to essay questions, with a tendency to skim and abridge ideas.

Essay organisation has been competent, sometimes excellent, with particularly strong, logical development of argument and balanced conclusions. The levels of engagement and skill displayed in discussing moral judgement and a healthy society, the impact of the internet on the arts, and public and private health systems were extremely encouraging and reflected well on the teaching of these elements of the specification. However, there are still candidates not used to producing essay style answers in examination conditions. These tend not to grasp the importance of outlining their understanding of the question's terms and framework, or of a clear and balanced structure leading to a conclusion. It is dangerous for candidates to rely on unsupported assertion and generalisation, leaving themselves unable to come up with any specific examples or evidence to support and illustrate the points they are attempting to convey.

The quality of written communication remains satisfactory, though there are some causes of concern. Some scripts struggle to communicate clearly, usually through a combination of factors such as poor spelling and vocabulary, weak sentence structure and lack of organisation. A small number appear to be unaware of the existence of capital letters and/or punctuation, while more believe commas and full stops to be entirely interchangeable and paragraphing an optional extra. That said, a number of scripts were delightful to read, with the sophistication of their vocabulary and expression, the range of their knowledge and their ability to construct a reasoned and coherent case – especially given that the work is produced in examination conditions.

Section A: The Cultural Domain

1(a) (i) Good answers stressed "hidden", "subliminal" or "unnoticed" aspects having "influence" on values and assumptions and referred for example to a television programme. Weak answers tended to see "value laden messages" as deliberately honed and targeted, containing specific information

1(a)(ii) Good answers stressed the generational differences in values aggravated by the influence of the media. Surprisingly, the gap between generations was set at as much as 30 years.

1(a)(iii) There was a strong emphasis on a harking back to values of a bygone age rather than “wistful” memories of a vanished youth.

1(b) This question was very well answered. Examples ranged from moral standards such as honesty, respect for elders and “common courtesy” to a respect for life or freedom of speech. The prices of houses, antiques, cars or jewellery were quoted as examples of the other kind of value.

1(c) It was important to identify reasons clearly, with illustration, to gain full marks. The most popular choice of word was ‘freedom’. The typical contrast struck was between different types of prisoner in their attitudes to ‘freedom’: The wrongly imprisoned associated it with justice, the hardened recidivist with a restoration of access to simple material pleasures outside. There were good developed historical examples using Nelson Mandela or the experience of Jews under the Nazis or political prisoners in Stalin’s gulags. Good use was also made of studies in religious studies/philosophy in defining “positive” and “negative” freedoms.

1(d) An often enthusiastically answered question. However, candidates were not always successful in gaining maximum marks, spending too much time explaining their chosen problem rather than focusing on solutions. The “local” focus was missed by some, while others failed to identify a specific problem merely repeating the question header relating to a generational conflict. There were some very good answers which were characterised by realistic and thoughtful solutions set out in a sympathetic and persuasive way.

Section B: The Cultural Domain

Question 2

Most candidates found this question difficult. The soundest essays usually centred the argument on the first two terms; the third sometimes led otherwise intelligently argued and written essays slightly off the subject into the virtues of utilitarianism.

A number of competently developed essays, however, failed to grapple with the core dilemma by neglecting to examine moral judgement at all. They detailed a number of instances of habitual communal activity that involved little soul-searching.

The best candidates gave a solid introduction and conclusion and spent some time exploring the idea of what a healthy society is and what the question means by exercising moral judgement. This at times meant that the wider picture, exploring the idea of greater good and society, was neglected. Supporting evidence and examples were, at best, tenuous and at worst irrelevant. Weak answers struggled to offer much that was meaningful and any examples were often anecdotal and of tangential relevance to the question. Better attempts defined the terms used in the question and tried to explore a couple of moral issues in context, often recognising the implicit reference to utilitarianism and offering some discussion of that theory.

There were one or two outstanding answers to this question, referring to such topics as Stalin’s Russia and the banking crisis in order to discuss the terms “healthy society” and “greater good”.

Question 3

This essay differentiated very well. The best candidates showed balance and different view points, even though favouring one. They showed detailed knowledge and engagement with the internet, acknowledging the transformation that the internet has brought about to the arts generally.

It was pleasing to see how candidates recognised the internet as having championed egalitarianism and also the inter-cultural potential of the medium, and so saw it as a stimulus to improvement rather than a threat to standards. They were able to show why those standards might no longer apply in the same way.

Most students saw the internet as a positive force and accordingly a large number of answers failed to give due weight to the damage it is alleged to have done. Where negative aspects were explored, they were usually in terms of lost revenue. Illegal downloading was often treated twice under closely related paragraphs that barely distinguished between popular music, cinema, and photography.

The question attracted some candidates who seemed to want to talk about a favourite art form (often music), to describe it and the effects that the internet has had on it. Some candidates offered a view that was simply too one-sided – totally defending the internet and therefore not addressing the idea of potential harm or damage. Other candidates talked about how much internet time is spent on a wide range of activities connected with business, education, and pleasure, and therefore the arts are being neglected. These answers proved too superficial and were usually lacking in supporting information to confirm and develop a point of view. Generalisations appeared in the form of statements such as 'no-one goes to the theatre nowadays because we are all on Facebook'.

Question 4

The question proved to be not as popular as questions 2 and 3. The first section of this question, covering the issue of enrichment, was effectively outlined and answered by most candidates. Some personal experience was put to good use. This came in the form of celebrating the effects that a certain art form or experience has had on an individual – even some examples of life-changing moments. A weakness occurred when candidates wrote generally about Art and its value but did not really tackle the idea of publicly funded arts projects and initiatives. When these were cited, there were some impassioned arguments from practitioners, particularly of dance or drama, who were able to describe psychological and more general health benefits, for society as well as the individual, derived from artistic activity. Benefits for the disabled and elderly were also included, sometimes from first-hand observation.

Time management appeared to be an issue in this question more than in any other. A number of well-developed arguments for the enriching virtues of art led to an argument concerning public funding only in the barest outline. Competent essays gave an adequate survey of competing claims for funding during a recession but only a few pointed out that investment in the arts might be addressing needs sometimes less successfully treated by the large spending on education and health ministries. Although there was some stress on the value of arts in supporting tourism, few attempted to compare productivity with that of other sectors or to examine in detail whether purely privately funded industries – such as the pop music business – could carry out the activity more effectively.

Section C: The Social Domain

5(a)(i) This was generally well answered by candidates who defined power in the political arena.

5 (a)(ii) It was perhaps disappointing to see how many students rated 'charisma' or 'good speaker' more highly than 'honesty', which they presumed to be an uncommon virtue in politicians. Nick Clegg's change of direction on tuition fees was frequently quoted as a counter example to 'honesty', and this indicated that candidates were interested and aware of contemporary political contexts. A few got sidetracked by their illustration, for example by lengthy discussion of the tuition fees decision in relation to that same politician.

5(a)(iii) Some very well-elaborated answers were given here. A confused electorate and a low vote; ill-defined policies and weak government; arbitrary legislation reflecting individual eccentricities and even a slide towards dictatorship were given as possible consequences. There were frequent references to Nazi Germany in the extreme scenarios; more measured ones noted Israeli constitutional experience. Better answers, which had grasped the concept as being effectively a system without parties, were able to offer a range of points, usually relating to the difficulty of making decisions or electing leaders and ministers.

5(b) Few students escaped a tendency to reproduce the headings from the question, with little elaboration. Some by imprecision in their writing gave the impression that political parties selected the opposition candidates; there was also a tendency to locate answers applicable to Function 3 (testing policies by submitting them to the vote at election time) to Function 2.

5(c) This was enthusiastically and often imaginatively answered. The Conservative Tree logo conveyed strength, freshness, fertility, change as well as longevity and tapped into ecological sympathies. The Liberal Democrat dove in flight spoke of freedom, peace, release and innovation. The Labour rose expressed passion, feelings for beauty and love as well as drawing on historical patriotic associations with the Tudors and more recently the England rugby team. The colour also recalled a broader socialist heritage.

Section D: The Social Domain

Question 6

A popular question that produced some interesting and positive responses. Outlines of differences between rural and city experiences were generally well handled, and many different views were revealed about preferences in relation to age, social status, financial disposition and peoples' different interpretation of 'exciting'. Good answers questioned the terms of the question, looked at the subjectivity of "excitement" and tried to categorise the types of person to whom different activities appealed.

The use of personal experience greatly enhanced essays and the support of examples proved to be an essential and important discriminator. Weaker essays often tended to be simplistic or superficial, many not getting beyond simply listing different activities. Indeed, some ignored the idea of 'exciting', producing responses that were very insular, solely based on personal experience without looking at the wider aspects of the question. Comments such as "the main leisure activities in the countryside are hunting and fishing" were alarmingly regular. It was surprising how many students had a stereotypical view of the countryside as picturesque, spacious, and technologically backward. Too many essays degenerated into lists of activities, somewhat artificially allocated to distinct geographic areas of operation and unaware of the number of the new types of industry and scientific establishments sited there. Clubs and shopping malls featured strongly amongst the city's leisure attractions, but were assumed to be hard to find outside the city.

The main weakness was to be confined to expressing personal choices through mere anecdote. The best answers explored to some degree the socio-economic context of leisure preferences with references to unstable or low-paid seasonal employment in the tourist areas or the lack of stimulation for young people leading to an exodus to the cities.

Question 7

Very few candidates tackled this question. Those that did tended to produce quite a good answer. The title guided them well and led to mostly well-structured essays heavily imprinted with material studied in politics lessons. This question is one where personal experience was least evident. Some candidates managed to support their answer with relevant work experience or personal political awareness and interest generated by the recent General Election. Whilst the resignations of Robin Cook and Claire Short were cited as evidence of the system's shortcomings, and both Tony Blair and Nick Clegg came in for criticism, on the whole the apparent unanimity sealed by cabinet responsibility was regarded as the least of all governmental evils.

Weaker responses saw candidates generating their 'for' and 'against' points from the question header, with little development, but there were excellent essays that referred to specific politicians and instances of cabinet decisions to illustrate viewpoints.

Question 8

A popular choice of question that was successfully tackled by many candidates. Two reasons for and against private health provision were readily identified but it was startling to note how many candidates thought that the question was about setting up a private health care system, rather than knowing one already exists. Simpler answers focused on the "better care" versus "it's not fair" line of argument, while others were able to see the wider context and potential effect for the NHS for a private system to run alongside it. Relatively few were able to demonstrate much specific knowledge of funding or of other issues relating to health care in this country; there were some alarming misconceptions, for example that there are 'better doctors and nurses in the private system'. In reality, many doctors work in both areas.

Comparisons with the American system were frequently made, usually to emphasise the unique benefits British citizens enjoy under the NHS, but no-one was sanguine about lengthening waiting times, restricted access to the best drugs, and 'the post-code lottery'. Quite often, developed arguments on the economic benefits of competition in driving up standards were combined with adroit philosophical balancing of the limits of freedom of choice on the one hand against a human right to equal treatment in matters of life and death on the other.

F732 The Scientific Domain

General Comments

It is pleasing to report that almost all candidates completed the paper within the time allocation. A small number of the extended writing pieces from Section B displayed evidence that they were rushed in the final parts.

The paper includes a mark allocation devoted to the candidates' ability to communicate their answers clearly. Examiners reported that in general candidates did well in this section of the mark allocation.

Examiners have commented that the paper performed well in discriminating between candidates. Whilst many high scoring performances were seen it was possible for less well prepared or less talented candidates to make some worthwhile responses.

Section A

Question 1

This question included source material composed of pie charts showing the origins of three gases in the atmosphere. It also included a table showing the reduction that had taken place in air pollution in recent years.

- (a) In these two questions candidates were asked to interpret three pie charts. The majority showed themselves well able to read the pie charts. Some candidates did not support their conclusions with evidence from the pie charts.
- (b) Some candidates did disagree with the statements and often gave ingenious and credit worthy reasons for their views.
- (c) In this question the percentage for the contribution of transport to air pollution was stated as 124%. Candidates were asked why this conclusion was flawed. This question exposed the rather limited mathematical understanding of many candidates. The percentage of 124% had been achieved by adding the percentage contribution from the three pie charts provided. Sadly quite a number of candidates felt that the flaw would be repaired if the 124% was divided by three to gain an average. Since percentages appear so much in everyday life it is suggested that centres provide a session where percentage construction and its underpinning assumptions are explored.

Some answers set off into a discussion of the severity of the pollution problem and disregarded the question that had been set.

In the second part of this question candidates had to provide a critique of pie charts. In general, they were not strong in this respect. Many retreated to recommending bar graphs as an alternative.

- (d) This was the highest scoring part of question 1. Most candidates recognised the considerable reductions that had taken place in the three pollutants. They were able to suggest reasons for the decreases in the past and to identify future moves that would continue the reduction. Some of the suggestions for the future were a little unrealistic but many did provide helpful ideas.

Half the eight marks available were allocated for the quality of the communication by the candidate. In general the candidates scored well with examiners able to understand clear answers that contained no significant lapses of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Question 2

This question included a written resource that described the provision of boxes for botanical exploration by the Royal Horticultural Society. The boxes were linked to the work of Darwin and were an initiative sparked by the low profile of science in many sixth forms.

- (a) In this question the candidates were asked to interpret two phrases taken from the source. The phrases were 'the 'Charles Darwins of the 21st century'' and 'to go on thinking walks''. Most candidates attempted to interpret these two phrases but their greatest problem was the repetition of the words in the question as explanation.

However many candidates gained marks for good interpretations that included such ideas as the collection of plants, an interest in ecology, an exploratory approach, working outside exploring nature and devising experiments.

Many candidates did not really understand the phrases and focused more on Charles Darwin rather than on what the children would actually be doing. So it was suggested that the children were to be great revolutionary scientists, overturning long held beliefs (perhaps they will!) rather than going out collecting plants, finding out the plants' names, planting their seeds, and so on. Another weakness was that often there was no reference to science whatsoever – the answer given would apply equally well had Darwin been a musician or a sculptor.

- (b) The source included the phrase 'skills shortage in science'. Candidates were asked to use their own words to identify the reasons given, in the source, for this shortage. This activity was unusual for some candidates who were more familiar with giving their own views. For this question they had to search the source and then, by interpretation, translate the messages into their own words. The responses were disappointing with many candidates showing a poor vocabulary that lacked precision and clarity. For example a typical translation of 'dull and repetitive' was 'boring'. Centres may wish to consider the type of activity involved in this question as part of their programme. Newspapers would provide a suitable source.
- (c) This question asked candidates to justify one way, other than 'The Great Plant Hunt', in which students might be encouraged to choose to study science at A-level.

Responses were generally good and divided into two groups. Some candidates felt the best form of encouragement involved showing students the opportunities a study of science would deliver. These included highly paid and worthwhile jobs and successful careers. To achieve this, candidates suggested visits to schools by eminent scientists or excursions from school to famous academic and commercial laboratories.

The alternative approach directed action towards teachers and the curriculum. Candidates tended to suggest that a more student, rather than subject-centred approach in the lower school would increase the numbers studying science at A level. More experiments and greater relevance to the lives of students were included as suggestions. In general the teaching of science as part of the lower school science curriculum was criticised.

Section B

In this section candidates had to answer one of three questions. In general Question 3 was the most popular choice. However examiners did notice that in some centres either question 4 or 5 was chosen by a large number of candidates.

Candidates are to be congratulated on the extended pieces of writing they produced. Time is at a premium in this examination and yet the majority of candidates were able to write extended responses.

Question 3

This question had a focus upon global warming. Candidates were asked why governments were so concerned about global warming. They then had to explain two actions that governments could take to slow the rate of global warming.

A small number of candidates were distracted from these main tasks and delivered pieces exploring the issue of global warming and its causes. A sizable number included reference to the link of pollution with damage to the Ozone layer.

Perhaps the most surprising shortcoming of a good number of candidates was the omission of any reference to the first part of the question. They moved directly to the actions that governments could take.

For those candidates identifying reasons for government concern the dominant ideas given were the melting of the polar ice caps, the plight of polar bears and coastal flooding. Extreme weather, shifts of climate, threats to food supply, problems with rainforests and the Great Barrier Reef, the spread of disease, salinity changes and movements of ocean currents gained only minority mentions. Tsunamis and earthquakes were questionably thought to be the product of global warming by some candidates. A number of candidates did mention that governments had to be seen to be concerned because it could influence their period of tenure through the ballot box.

Quite a number of candidates included mention of the roles of China and the United States in terms of concern for global warming. These usually amounted to a rather negative view of these major economic powers.

Candidates were stronger in their suggestions of the actions that governments could take. Many suggestions focused upon fuels and transport. Some better candidates explained how taxation could be used to reduce demand and consequently slow global warming. Centres might consider exploring with their candidates the limits to the power of government. At the same time they could look at the potential negative features of programmes. For example some candidates suggested measures that were clearly beyond the powers of most democratic governments eg allowing families only one car or only allowing families and industry so much electricity per year. Similarly they might look at the negative effects of some of their more draconian taxation policies.

In general this popular question produced many good answers where all the tasks were completed.

Question 4

This question used the conclusion of the American mathematician John Allen Paulos that the three mathematical concepts a person needs in everyday life are proportion, risk and probability. Candidates had to explain how these concepts inform everyday decision making. A final challenge was to suggest one further mathematical concept that might be added to the list of three.

Candidates selecting this question tended to do so for positive reasons. It was not chosen as a refuge of last resort by candidates finding none of the choice questions suitable. For this reason the great majority of answers had merit.

The most disappointing aspect of the answers was the absence of much formal mathematical notation to give depth to responses.

However there were many positive aspects to the answers. These included many appropriate everyday examples, some criticism of the list provided by Paulos in that risk and probability were very similar concepts. Of the three, candidates found proportion the hardest to develop. The most popular way to approach proportion appeared to be through diet or cookery recipes.

The final part of the question asked candidates to suggest one further addition to the list. There were many helpful suggestions including scale, trend, rate of change, estimation and measurement. Very few suggestions included any specific mathematical clarification of their suggestion.

Question 5

This question involved candidates demonstrating how they would use the Hypothesis Testing Model to explore the suggestion that females aged 17 are better at examinations than males of the same age.

In past papers candidates have been invited to explore or test an assertion by designing a suitable experiment. Those questions proved very unpopular with candidates. By providing the model as part of this question, its popularity was raised.

The strongest part of the answers came in the candidates' demonstration of their familiarity with the various stages of the model. They were strong in their preliminary research of the work of others, their formulation of a hypothesis, and justification of a method and the collection of data. Quality fell away when it came to processing and analysing the data collected. The candidates appeared to have a sound knowledge of evaluation and the role of feedback. The biggest challenge for the candidates came in using the model to design an investigation into the assertion given in the question. Performance was very varied, with some having a good knowledge of sampling or the construction of a hypothesis. However the analysis phase tended to be in terms of presentation through graphs and tables. A very small number of candidates suggested testing, for example through correlation or significance.

One pleasing aspect came from better candidates who recognised the importance of semantics and the meaning of words such as 'better' in their answers.

What was pleasing to read was that many candidates would be very robust in their self criticism of their work and accepting of comment arising from peer review.

Conclusion

Time management can be an issue with this short paper. Candidates should see the mark allocations shown on the question paper as a useful guide the amount of time to spend on a question. A classic example in this paper was question 1(c) (ii), where answers – for two marks – often ran to half a page.

In general, however, this was an entry of candidates who were well prepared for the examination, engaged with the questions set, managed their time well and showed what they knew, understood and could do in the time available. Examiners noted time and again that in Section B that better answers were usually preceded by an elaborate plan. This frequently ensured that all parts of the question were answered.

F733 Domain Exploration: Applying Synoptic Skills

General Comments

Candidates engaged well with this paper, taking it seriously and making conscientious efforts to meet its demands. It was encouraging to note that very few candidates responded with negative comments. It was also pleasing to note that many of them had evidently been prepared by Centres who had provided focused and structured teaching towards the examination.

Examiners noted that although many candidates' spelling, punctuation and grammar were adequate, the use of the possessive apostrophe continues to decline, as does that of the colon and semi-colon. Many candidates also showed haphazard control of paragraphing – possibly as a consequence of being able to use a word processor to paragraph work after it has been written. The use of word processors also probably accounts for the fact that many candidates' handwriting deteriorated beyond legibility as their scripts proceeded. Centres would enhance their candidates' preparation for the examination by giving them opportunities to write essays in long-hand.

Centres would equally help their candidates by coaching them to produce concise, focused and above all shorter answers to Questions 1, 2 and 3 in Section A. Many Examiners noted candidates who wrote two full pages in answer to each of these questions, and it was often the case that such answers earned the full quota of awardable marks from only a quarter of their wordage. Often such candidates went on to produce inadequate essays in Section B which clearly suffered from lack of time in both planning and execution. Granted, focused examination technique cannot replace well practised skills, a sound knowledge base and the ability to write clear English to exhibit a balanced argument; but it can help candidates to make the best of whatever qualities they possess. Candidates need to allocate their time appropriately in relation to the number of marks available for a question.

Section A

Question 1

This question required candidates to identify a logical fallacy in each of four statements. The fallacies in question were: [A] begging the question/assuming the answer; [B] a syllogism based on the false premise that "all politicians are liars"; [C] that because an opinion is shared does not guarantee its correctness; [D] that events or conditions that coincide in time mean that and nothing more. Many deduced the false logic correctly. The best performances were in [B] and [C]. Many candidates missed the point of [A], that prediction would not automatically protect. It was disappointing that many candidates confidently asserted that [D] must be wrong because "God does not exist" – an assertion for which they offered no evidence.

Question 2

A majority of candidates identified the correct order for the sources [C – B – A] and of these many went on to score full marks by citing reasons. It was encouraging to note, with reference to Source B, that many candidates placed great faith in the professional integrity and intellectual prowess of Advanced Level Examiners.

Question 3

This question discriminated well, in that some candidates struggled to pinpoint drawbacks and/or assess effectiveness accurately. Source A, said many, presented a difficulty in reading left to right. In Source B some misread the abbreviation %age [= percentage] as a reference to attendees' ages. Many said of Source C that a short paragraph was overlong and boring. Nonetheless some candidates scored effectively in this question.

Question 4

Given that candidates brought their own views about *The Times*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* to this question it proved to be an effective discriminator. The main weakness of many responses was that Source A was evaluated to say more than it did – a record of sales figures and no more. Similarly, Source B was often taken too seriously, given its provenance. That said, able candidates were able to conflate the sources with their own knowledge, producing interesting and well argued answers. Average candidates summarised the sources and added straightforward or simple comment, and the less able simply recycled the sources. There were some excellent answers centred on the interesting phenomenon of one medium [TV] commenting on another [the press].

Section B

Section B discriminated well and seemed to offer all candidates some opportunity to show what they knew and could do in the three domains. The best candidates, as always, produced thoughtful and thorough answers which were a pleasure to read.

Question 5

The least popular of the essay questions, this discriminated well among those who answered it. Writing a focused answer depended on a careful reading of the question. Discussing "the arguments presented in the source supporting the role of the arts in prison life" needs to begin with a careful deconstruction of the source. But crucially, a sound knowledge of the arts and how they may affect those who practise them needs also to be allied to a consideration of how prisoners may find them beneficial, and why. The best answers worked on this basis, and often showed a heartening empathy. Answers which stuck to the source [the majority], considering its arguments critically, could score well in level 3. The least successful answers were those who considered the arts a treat [along with mythical free X-boxes and HD television sets] which prisoners did not deserve. It was disappointing also to find that although candidates advocated rehabilitation as a function of prison, they could not recognise the potential role of the arts in such a process.

Question 6

This question often produced well informed and well argued answers, in which the benefits of technology were carefully balanced with its drawbacks. Entertainment was more popular than Crime Detection as a topic, though both subjects enabled candidates to cite a good range of examples. Some candidates, however, saw technological advance as an inarguable good in itself, as if the ability for example to use CGI in films was somehow a guarantee of those films' quality. Of all the Section B questions this was the most likely to produce a truly synoptic answer in which social, scientific and cultural domains were covered.

Question 7

Of the options offered in this question, the most popular was choosing the sex of children; a cure for cancer and a safe legal drug were equally popular, with climate control less popular. In general, popularity mirrored the effectiveness of the answers. Many who wrote of climate control did not seem to realise that one country's benefit would be another's drawback: and some indeed opted out of the discussion and presented irrelevant essays on climate change.

In the other three topics, two characteristics emerged. First, many candidates chose a topic evidently because they felt strongly about it and were able to present compelling arguments on one side, but then struggled to balance these with countervailing ideas. Second, many candidates failed to see that a good answer to the question involved cross-domain thinking about the social, scientific and cultural issues it involves. That said, this question produced a very wide spread of marks, with the greatest concentration of marks coming in level 3. Perhaps average candidates chose this question as they saw it as the least demanding of the three, which it was not. At the same time, it was a question which enabled some candidates to use their personal experiences – particularly in connection with cancer and drug usage – to enrich their answers.

Of all aspects of General Studies, encounters with such candidates, and engaging with their scripts, are privileged moments in the work of an examiner.

F734 Culture, Science and Society: Making Connections

General Comments

Examiners were pleased with the maturity and focus shown by the vast majority of candidates and in particular with the copious but relevant amounts which were written in response to the questions. This, together with the focused responses, suggested that candidates had engaged with the subject material.

Many candidates produced an essay plan before attempts were made to start their response. The better responses were clearly organised, while less successful scripts tended to have no plan and many corrections. While many candidates had thought about the construction of their responses, examiners still comment on the often poor quality of presentation in terms of handwriting, spelling and grammar. There are still homophone errors (for example to/too, their/there/they're) but the growing incidence of 'would of' instead of 'would have' and its other derivatives is worrying.

It was encouraging that candidates produced thoughtful answers for question one, but too often this was at the expense of adequate responses in question two. This suggests that time was not allocated appropriately between questions. Candidates are reminded that to give themselves the best opportunity of gaining marks reflecting their ability they should offer approximately equal time to each answer.

In both questions candidates were able to make use of the sources, but again the better responses were from candidate who had used the source material as a 'springboard' for their own ideas and opinions. The weaker responses placed heavy reliance on the source material and gave little time or consideration to their own ideas.

Question 1

This question offered four different aspects relating to matters of life and death. Candidates were asked to consider these, identify issues from the three domains and then conclude the extent to which responsibility for such decisions should lie with the individual, family or professionals.

The question was in two parts and it seems that those candidates who considered the domain issues through the discussion of responsibility had more success. Those who chose to consider the issues and then responsibility often found themselves short of time and rushing to a conclusion.

It cannot be easy for candidates of seventeen to eighteen years of age to consider the notion of death but examiners were pleased to find significant numbers of thoughtful, focussed and empathetic answers. Many cited personal experience of such situations and while some were simply described, others were explored in a pertinent and supportive manner.

In weaker responses, there was confusion and a lack of clarity. Some candidates suggested that Terry Pratchett had already died, others confused the notion of suicide with assisted suicide, and a further group believed that suicide was still illegal. Generally these errors came about as the result of misinterpreting or misreading the source material. Candidates are advised to make time to read the source to ensure accurate information.

When outlining issues within domains, candidates were often able to make some links. Most common were issues of religious belief and the impact this has on science. Frequently cited were Jehovah's Witnesses who refuse blood transfusions, and the impact this might have on decisions about life and death. Other common links were established between science and society. Here there were discussions about the cost of maintaining life support machines and about other potentially beneficial uses to which such money could be put.

In a few cases candidates raised more sinister issues relating to life and death. The notion of 'gentle persuasion' mentioned by Terry Pratchett was developed to encompass enforced death at a given age in order to maintain population rather than allow it to increase. Often this social issue was linked to the scientific issue of improved medicine and technology enabling a longer life span.

A small number considered the role of the media and in particular cited examples from 'the soaps' such as *Eastenders*. For many this was the only experience of life and death they had encountered. However, it was pleasing that candidates were able to recognise the significance of these storylines.

Where there was domain omission it was usually the scientific domain that suffered, as a result of over-indulgence in social issues. This restricted the level achieved as a consequence.

Where candidates considered issues which would positively and negatively impact upon decisions this allowed a balanced argument, greater discussion of the outcome and assessment of extent. This resulted in achievement at the higher levels.

Question 2

This question asked candidates to respond to source material in relation to choices when buying food and to consider the notion of limiting choices. Generally the quality of responses for this question was not as good as in question one, for reasons which have already been discussed.

When discussing cultural issues it was often pleasing to note that candidates were aware of the changing nature of 'typically British' food. Several commented that what 'we' think of as Indian or Chinese has in fact been adapted to please the British palate and bears little resemblance to authentic food from those countries. Additionally, many candidates espoused the virtues of traditionally British foods and expressed concern about the very real possibility of their demise.

Common considerations from the scientific domain were those of the environment and the impact choices about food can have. These ranged from global warming to waste creation and disposal, genetically modified foods, packaging and obesity. The range was vast and this domain was often the one analysed and discussed with the greatest success by respondents.

Social issues often revolved around costs and the economy. The more able candidates were able to make the links between the domains and also to consider the issues on a local, national and international stage. Within this domain candidates also explored the notion of animal rights: the weaker candidates often dwelling sympathetically on the plight of chickens.

The variation from 'issues in each domain' in question one to the more focussed 'one issue from each domain' of this question posed some planning problems for the less able candidates. The question was in two parts but often the second part of the question was ignored or left until the final paragraph; almost as an afterthought. More able candidates were able to give due consideration to both parts of the question. Additionally those who were able to consider both positive and negative aspects of limiting food choice accessed the highest levels.

Concluding Comments

Candidates too often sacrificed clarity at the expense of overlong responses; it appears that poor time management skills hampered the performance of many. Candidates need to read questions carefully and note the various challenges they pose. They can then allocate appropriate time when constructing their answers. Centres are encouraged to support their students in developing this skill.

Once again centres are thanked for preparing many candidates so well for this examination. It is the agreement of the examiners that they enjoyed reading the majority of scripts which show that the candidates that were sitting the F734 paper have many thoughtful and pertinent opinions.

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