

General Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H479**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H079**

OCR Report to Centres

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

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

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Overview

As an introduction to the detailed reports on the performance of each of the units it is appropriate to share a number of common views held by Principal Examiners. It was generally felt that the majority of candidates were well prepared for the examination and met its demands with enthusiasm. The evidence suggested that candidates were able to think logically and coherently about a wide range of subject areas often producing responses that were both enlightening and original.

Sound reasoning and clear thinking were quite evident and provided the basis on which candidates could build a series of solid arguments. This approach was clearly evident in the extended writing demanded by the A2 units, with candidates adopting a range of strategies both to persuade their audience as well as to discredit the premises which were presented to them. However, there continues to be some concern regarding the amount of time spent on answering questions of a low mark tariff at AS level.

In the case of Unit F731, the candidates are faced with four demanding sections to complete in two hours. In Sections A and C there were cases of candidates writing excessively in answer to questions worth only two or three marks thereby restricting the amount of time that was left to write more extensively in Sections B and D. Following from this, the specification indicates that in Sections B and D (Unit F731) and Section B (Unit F732) candidates should provide an answer in the form of an essay. By simply introducing a series of facts supported by simple extension and some examples, the essay appeared in only skeletal form and lacked the structure and development required to access the higher mark levels. Centres are advised to consider ways in which to prepare candidates for the answering of essay style questions in a half hour time frame and taking opportunities to practise and perfect this approach prior to the examination.

Many candidates use their personal life experience, learning, and reading to enrich their work. In Units F733 and F734, examiners were pleased to observe a wide range of examples which, for the most part, served as an admirable supplement to the main thrust of any arguments being proposed. However, once again, the tendency towards anecdote and irrelevance is still of some concern. During this session there was a noticeable number of what appeared to be pre-learned and prepared essays on key topics (notably in the Scientific Domain) that were moulded to fit the candidate's question choice. For example, it was quite common to see an essay concerned with Water Pollution being transformed into an account of Global Warming.

The content of the question is usually the clue to a successful answer and centres are advised to spend time with candidates unpicking and dissecting the question stem into its separate components, parts and themes. By adopting this approach there is more chance of a fuller and more accurate answer and not, as sometimes happens, the transformation into a totally different question. In assessing the strength of thinking and analytical skills, examiners are looking for a broad spectrum of viewpoints, not just strengths and weaknesses – even the weakest of positions can have some redeeming features. In weighing evidence and balancing probabilities candidates show the depth of their understanding, and reveal the extent to which they are prepared for the demands of Higher Education. This remains the strength of this specification – an opportunity to provide a podium for each candidate to demonstrate the fundamental academic skills of enquiry and deduction that are key components in any degree course.

Finally, a word about communication. Examiners are becoming increasingly concerned with the decline in the quality of written English both in terms of the range and the accuracy of expression used. It is advisable to spend part of the General Studies course considering this aspect of the examination bearing in mind that some candidates may be studying A level subjects that require the production of very little written work. Practise essays and some coverage of commonly misspelt words, phrases and idioms may assist candidates and effect some improvements. It is equally worthy of comment that examiners encountered work of high quality, panache and elegance which revealed maturity of thought and depth of engagement with the examination tasks.

F731 The Cultural and Social Domains

General Comments

The performance of candidates remains consistent and there is evidence of a few candidates not taking the examination seriously. Most candidates managed to complete the paper in the time allowed and the questions set promoted a sense of engagement and understanding of the issues that needed to be explored. It is important to emphasise to candidates the importance of reading the wording carefully to avoid any misunderstanding and to consider the allocation of marks for each question to allocate time to answer as fully as possible. This is particularly the case in Sections A and C where the requirement for a short answer is being overlooked and where candidates have been seen to write extensively in response to a question that is only worth a relatively small number of marks.

In Sections A and C candidates need reminding that the responses to questions worth few marks generally require the introduction of a piece of knowledge or fact plus some support and/or example to access full marks. Centres are reminded of the need for examination practice, especially in the presentation and structure of answers. This is a crucial step to attaining higher marks in what is an examination that essentially tests the student's thinking skills and their ability to organise a clear and convincing response that communicates with the examiner. In this context, examiners have reported the extremes of almost unintelligible prose to pure eloquence, largely determined by the candidates' ability to write clear, succinct English with few errors and a range of related vocabulary. The main features to highlight that are frequent misspellings of common words or words featured in the questions, weak punctuation and sentence structure as well as lack of paragraphing.

Whilst the essay questions in Sections B and D did promote interesting and enthusiastic responses from most candidates, there remains a concern that some of the specification is a mystery to others. This is particularly evident in respect of the arts and political processes. For example, there were many instances of sport being included as amateur art and there appeared to be little understanding of local government and its powers. These are key areas of the specification and it is important that students are prepared for and aware of their significance and importance through a structured and organised programme of study.

Examiners are aware that it is unlikely that every candidate will have knowledge and experience of all areas of the specification though it is expected that the range and choice of questions will enable a sixth form student to be able to construct and present a reasonably convincing response that will demonstrate their ability to think and organise a cogent argument. It is important to inform candidates of the idea that essays in Sections B and D are vehicles for balanced discussion, perhaps with the introduction of their own personal experience, not simply a list of points, some of which are often of dubious relevance.

Question 1

- (a) Financial reward or popularity appeared as popular answers to the meaning of commercial success although a number of candidates thought that the phrase referred to appearing in advertisements. Critical success was less well understood with some arguing that it was when the artist had worked hard.
- (b) (i) In answering this question it was important to highlight that success was not the important criteria but the need to make the music available so that the listener can make their own judgement. This subtlety seems to be understood with weaker responses referring to the need to gain a new audience for financial gain to offset the investment made in producing the music.

- (b) (ii) The important factors that needed to be highlighted in the meaning of this phrase were that the public had high expectations of consistency in the quality of music and that fans see artists as role models: these were the most popular answers. However, a more perceptive response would refer to the fact that artists fear the loss of their identity and individual talent at the expense of commercialism.
- (c) The opportunity was presented to repeat some of the material used for 1bii) though the question was aimed at covering the personal impact that success had on the artist such as fears for the integrity of their music or having to change their music to appeal to a mass audience. Having to change their lifestyle to comply with the demands of becoming a celebrity or even fear for their personal safety were interesting and creditable references made by candidates. A majority of answers gave at least one developed reason based on the need to be a responsible role model. Other valid areas such as the responsibility to a record label or to fans were discussed.
- (d) The question promoted some very interesting and perceptive responses that showed a very good understanding of the creative process. Despite a number of answers failing to choose a piece of work it was possible to demonstrate a discerning understanding of each stage of creation through the use of examples of personal experience. By using this as an opportunity to write a detailed account of a passion for a particular song or album or artist, some candidates missed the point of the question and focused on a celebration of excellence. The best answers were from candidates who used their own involvement in a production e.g. in one case, Romeo and Juliet, or in another case, an appearance in a ballet, in order to explain the stages. In general the term 'realisation' was not well understood, and an assessment of success was often omitted.

Question 2

The essay allowed candidates an opportunity to select two situations with which they were familiar and that would enable them to write with confidence, possibly referring to personal experience. A successful answer depended on the ability to define and explain the meaning of conscience which it appeared that few of those who chose this question were able to do.

Where appropriate situations were identified these were generally not convincingly developed in the context of conscience with many essays presenting two situations which simply illustrated opposing opinions to a life situation. For example, some candidates chose a football match where a referee's decision had conflicted with that of the majority of spectators. Answers were presented referring to the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Hitler's actions in World War 2 but overall the candidates' choices were inappropriate ones because of a seeming lack of understanding of morality or conscience. It was frequently unclear who exactly were the *individuals* and *majority* holding the views. More often, the cases illustrated attempted to reveal the desires of an individual conflicting with the conscience of a majority, and the views of each were frequently asserted or assumed.

Question 3

The question began with a quotation that gave lots of clues to the areas that needed exploring. Is local radio essential? How important is listener interaction? Is it a lifeline to lots of people? How important is the fact that presenters know the area? Without local radio, will communities be weakened? A number of candidates demonstrated a broad, general knowledge of local radio and were able to make reasonable observations about its position and influence. It became apparent that not many teenagers listen to local radio or had any clear knowledge or experience of its extent, content, and influence.

Apart from identifying traffic and weather reports few were able to talk about the range of issues covered by most local radio stations. Most wrote about general issues that were concerned with radio broadcasting in general terms such as the assertion that it is a useful thing for those who are too poor to have television (fewer than 2% in the U.K. and most of those not because of poverty), or the fact that they can be heard in cars. The most common argument against local radio was the increasing use of other technologies. The cost of maintaining stations and all matters of income and expenditure were rarely mentioned. Only a few candidates presented a known example of a local radio station and were able to make informed contrasts with national stations and consider their relative merits.

Question 4

As in all examinations, an attempt to unpick the elements of the question would provide an appropriate and secure prelude to the main body of an essay. In this case there was very little evidence of any candidates having a secure knowledge of what precisely constituted amateur arts; in fact, most did not mention a specific arts activity in their entire essay. It became clear that most candidates did not recognise that the question was firmly placed in the Cultural Domain and therefore it was concerned with the Arts and their promotion. Benefits tended to focus on social issues such as 'keeping people off the streets', 'making new friends', or 'providing an activity to occupy young people's spare time;' increased confidence, social skills and creativity were also commonly cited though these could have applied to any activity and not exclusively amateur arts.

In considering the issues affecting the long-term survival of amateur arts there was the absence of any discussion of how they may be maintained and financed. This is a particularly disappointing omission at a time when local and national government funding cuts have been so much in the news.

Question 5

- (a) It was pleasing to see that most candidates did not simply describe the image and instead sought to interpret the artist's intentions. A number of issues were presented and full marks were awarded by considering overcrowding on roads, environmental pollution, green-friendly cycling or the effects on the mood of travellers, amongst others. Examiners were flexible enough to allow for more ingenious explanations such as the criticism of cyclists for ignoring the rules of the road.
- (b) (i) The question clearly asked for explanations of the patterns of travel therefore it was not enough to simply state the main facts that could be lifted from the source. Many answers were too brief to gain maximum marks but the recognition of the fact that cars were preferred because of their convenience and that more people had access to bus routes were accepted interpretations of the information. Some answers consisted of repeated or paraphrased text.
- (b) (ii) By ignoring the word 'government' and focusing on the need to tackle purely cosmetic issues such as hard seats, unpleasant odours, litter and the lack of wi-fi, some candidates missed the point of the question; it appeared that most candidates believe that their local transport services are controlled by the government. Examiners were looking for issues such as privatisation of road, guided bus ways, incentives to make people leave their car at home, subsidised travel or the restriction of traffic in town centres. There were some interesting suggestions detailing advertising campaigns to attract people to public transport.

- (c) The question invited candidates to focus on their own locality and demonstrate an understanding and awareness of issues that affect the population. This gave the opportunity to write with more authority and with specific and detailed examples such as the plight of the elderly or mothers with push chairs or the issues affecting local schools and colleges. The inclusion of assertions about too few buses or train stations, expensive fares, and equally basic solutions such as more buses and trains and cheaper fares were common solutions that were suggested. By not fully considering the impact of raising the cost of fuel to prohibitive levels there was no link to the impact on bus fares. Equally the idea of widening roads would be impractical in many places yet was commonly presented as a response that would solve all.

Question 6

This was the least popular choice in this section. Candidates were expected to understand the difference between local elected politicians and national government. It was also suggested that some reference could be made to health, education and the environment in order to develop and secure arguments. The best answers were clear in their distinction between decisions at local level and national even if they confused the idea of local politicians and Members of Parliament. A local candidate was seen to make the right decisions for a local area; but regional differences in needs and priorities were identified, and the likelihood that such a move would cause chaos. Most answers were brief and assertive often revealing a weak understanding of political processes. Despite the question stem, few specific references were made to health, education or the environment.

Question 7

Examiners noted that many candidates had a weak understanding of the purposes of league tables. Some believed they are based on opinion rather than statistical evidence and thereby did not consider the wider implications of this method of classification. More sophisticated answers were developed by discussing related class issues and the effects on local communities. Access to information and the ability to interpret the tables were also considered and discussed in the more discerning essays. The alternatives offered were sometimes implausible or impractical such as 'sending a member of the government around all schools' or 'asking every pupil what they thought'. A number suggested an extension of the Ofsted system, or, in one case, making more use of local government knowledge and expertise. In reality, many of the alternative proposals ended up sounding exactly like a league table, which tended to make the reader question whether the concept had, in fact, been understood at all.

Question 8

This was quite popular but was rarely well done. Surprisingly, in a number of answers, there was no obvious connection between the tension sources or causes of trouble, and the proposed measures to improve matters. Such proposals were usually very simplistic along the lines of education, legislation and increased mixing in the racial answers, and education, legislation and increased positive discrimination in the gender answers. Better answers on gender considered a range of contexts, such as education, work and the home, and recognised the limits of existing legislation. This latter angle also featured in better answers on racial intolerance.

Introductions to essays were generally weak e.g. 'Racial Intolerance has been around for a long time'. There were many unsupported generalisations and a lot of traditional stereotypes. Many observed that laws should be passed banning discrimination in the work place and ensuring equal pay arrangements. Few considered 'fair and effective' but the best 'racial' answers tended to come from members of communities who appeared to have had first-hand experience of intolerance.

A number of candidates offered examples of inequalities suffered by men, in the case of gender, and by white people in the case of racial intolerance; there were also specific examples given of racial inequality or abuse suffered by black footballers recently. Candidates appeared to show little knowledge of existing laws against either racial or gender discrimination though the very perceptive candidates were quite pragmatic in noting that the issues are likely to be ever-present in society, stemming as they do from visible differences.

F732 The Scientific Domain

General Comments

The overall performance of candidates, including the quality of written communication, was good. Time was used very well and there was evidence of a clear focus on the questions. It was encouraging to see that candidates had taken note of the mark allocations when preparing their responses which meant that that Section A did not include lengthy answers that were disproportionate to the marks available. As in previous reports, it is important to remind centres that candidates need to be able to use a calculator as the course content involves the use of mathematical skills gained at GCSE and this is examined in Section A.

There were many well expressed and constructed answers in Section B, in particular where examples and personal experience had been included to support the essay. A large number of candidates were able to demonstrate specific knowledge from their sixth form studies as well as their own personal knowledge and experience. It was encouraging to see very few rubric errors in this session. However, some candidates failed to maintain a scientific focus in their essay and often strayed into the Social Domain with their answers. For example in Question 5, answers which referred to economic problems such as the increase in population causing fewer jobs to be available, and more benefits needed, omitted the Scientific Domain completely.

In Section B, the questions contain many key words which candidates must take note of in order to fully appreciate the scope and extent of the essay that they are undertaking. There was evidence of a failure to tackle and define these key words of the questions. For example in Question 3, there was reference to funding and this was often omitted. In Question 4 the focus was on the ways in which the pollution might be reduced in the future; the key words here were 'briefly' and 'outline' but seldom did examiners see evidence of these tasks being completed effectively.

As a matter of style and construction, the introductions to the essays are not required to give a paraphrased repetition of the question but a definition of terms and an outline of the key areas of the problem to be discussed. Similarly, a concise and meaningful conclusion helps candidates to strengthen their response and often shows an overall understanding of the main issues of the question. It is also an opportunity for the statement of a personal view or a projection of how the problem or issue may develop in the future.

Overall handwriting was good, but attention must be paid to the presentation, style and coherence of essays in Section B. Assessment Objective 4 (Communication) is assessed throughout the paper; candidates who responded to the essays with a list of thoughts and little attempt to organise the material into paragraphs or themes were not rewarded well for their communication skills.

Section A

Question 1

The central theme of this question was the understanding of the presentation of data.

- (a) Most candidates were able to cite negative correlation between the CO₂ emitted and the fuel consumption. Only a few responses included reference to negative correlation but followed this by an explanation of a positive correlation.

- (b) This question included reference to the information in Fig. 1 ‘which may be misleading’ and many candidates did not take note of these key words. Consequently their responses often referred to what was **not** included in the graph rather than what **did** appear and why it might be misleading. For example, the source of the information or the line of best fit were commented on neither of which appeared in Fig. 1. Good responses involved the candidate pointing out the anomalies or the way in which the points were distributed; also, references to the small sample size of 17 cars and the fact that this would not be representative. Although many noted that the g/kg might be misleading only a few continued to comment on the mix of metric and imperial units.
- (c) This part of the question was answered well. There was clear evidence of an awareness of the variables which could be included. For example, the make and year of the car and its engine size, which would all affect fuel consumption. Most candidates included some comment about the inclusion of the line of best fit which would allow more accurate readings between the clusters of points. The journey time and the terrain of the tests were used quite effectively to demonstrate full knowledge of presentation and collection of data.
- (d) Most candidates were able to perform the correct conversion by multiplying the two numbers; only a minority divided them. Even when it was obvious that a candidate did not have a calculator, there was evidence of attempts at multiplication in various forms.

Question 2

This question involved logical approaches to patterns of numbers. Where candidates had supported their answer by some correct working out, some credit was given even if the final answer was incorrect.

- (a) This part of the question was answered well with most candidates gaining two marks for a correct statement. Some answers were seen where the candidate had not made it clear which number they were referring to when they wrote ‘add one to the previous number’. A response which only gave a list of the differences was given some credit; candidates should be encouraged to explain patterns both mathematically and verbally. Incorrect answers included the fact that the numbers appeared to be two even numbers followed by two odd numbers.
- (b) This part of the question was also answered well with clear working out and correct substitution of the numbers gaining the full allocation of three marks. However, in an incorrect answer it was common to see the following:
- ‘4’ was incorrectly subtracted from all of the calculations resulting in one correct answer of 28 but followed by $2 \times 5^2 - 4 = 46$ and $2 \times 6^2 - 4 = 68$.
 - multiplying $n \times 2$ before squaring $2 \times 4 = 8^2 = 64 - 4$ to give an incorrect answer of 60.

The working out shown sometimes allows a mark to be gained even if there is an incorrect answer. The information of the value of 15 when $n = 3$ was given to encourage candidates to check that they were using the correct algebraic sequence.

- (c) Candidates appeared to have made good use of the space below the question for their working out. It was possible to allocate a wide range of marks as most candidates had some initial idea of a logical approach. This was mostly evidenced by the numbers from 1 to 30 and ‘O’ and ‘C’ next to the locker number as the progression of opening and closing continued. A few candidates forgot that locker 1 would always be open and omitted it from their final list. It was encouraging to see a variety of methods but it must be highlighted that some errors were introduced because of untidy working or lack of clarity in the table.

Candidates need reminding that, even though they may not have completed the question fully, their working out might result in some marks being awarded. Working out in the form of a table must be clearly labelled so that any correct answers can be seen by the examiner. On a few occasions it was possible to award marks to candidates who had not written their answers on the lines provided, but had completed their answer within their table by clearly indicating which lockers were open.

A few candidates simply stated that the only lockers open at the end would be the ones with three factors, i.e. square numbers. They quoted the following:

- $1 = 1$
- $4 = 1, 2, 4$
- $9 = 1, 3, 9$
- $16 = 1, 2, 4, 8, 16$
- $25 = 1, 5, 25$

Incorrect answers often included reference to prime numbers, often with some errors in the understanding of them. It was common to see the multiples of 4 or 5 in a list.

Section B

Question 3

There were some discerning candidates who very effectively used the opportunity to apply their scientific knowledge on their chosen area. Very good responses included research in nuclear energy, nuclear fusion and nuclear fission, genetic engineering, cloning and stem cell research. The most common choices were cancer research, space exploration and HIV/AIDS. Candidates who cited examples in their essays strengthened their response, for example, space exploration and naming specific probes, planets and minerals that might be found in space. This question allowed the use of scientific areas with which the candidates had some solid knowledge which they could use to suggest why funding should be increased. Advantages offered in terms of cancer research or stem cell research often included the idea that there might be more specialist equipment and that money may be made available so that scientists could work together to find a possible cure. With reference to stem cell research or cloning there were many references to advantages of organs being grown or cures for hereditary diseases. Disadvantages mainly focused on the notion that, despite the extra funding, a cure may never be found and therefore it would be a waste. Other ideas included the fact that it might deny the funding of other worthwhile projects or that the time scale involved was too long.

In weaker responses, candidates had not taken into consideration that the key phrase of the question was that of *increased funding*. They took the opportunity to merely produce a pre-prepared essay, for example on Genetically Modified Food, or they simply wrote about a research area of their choice with no reference to the funding issue. Some simply gave two advantages and two disadvantages in the form of a list with little or no development of their ideas.

Question 4

Many candidates displayed a good knowledge of water pollution. Accurate scientific examples were given of eutrophication and an awareness of the health problems arising from the everyday use of polluted water in some countries. Several perceptive ways to reduce pollution were cited, for example the introduction of government regulations and fines levied on industries that dumped waste or on ships carrying oil.

In addition, the idea that farming should be monitored more carefully to avoid overuse of fertilisers and a more effective way of monitoring water quality should be investigated. Examples of Japan and the nuclear reactor problems, Water Aid projects and filters for use in countries which experience poor quality water were also included. Problems with coral reefs and reference to the latest BP oil spill showed a wider understanding of the issues. However, although many candidates provided information about the problems caused, weaker responses spent too much time on developing the problems and very little on the ways in which they might be reduced in the future. Candidates who merely suggested that litter and dumping rubbish in lakes and rivers could be solved by more dustbins, and people monitoring these areas, had obviously not prepared themselves very well for the question.

Question 5

Candidates were able to identify three problems, and by developing points with specific examples, they showed a good understanding of the environmental issues. Energy use, including nuclear and fossil fuels, together with the need for more space for growing crops and housing more people were frequently presented as well as the effects of Global warming. Pollution in China and deforestation in Brazil, were common examples along with examples of the food chain being interrupted and loss of animal habitats. Over fishing and dwindling stocks in the whole oceanic food chain and the increased need for more mineral resources were also useful and insightful examples. Sometimes there was an overlap of ideas, and better responses integrated ideas together very well. For example, when the problem related to land use, because of the need for more housing or crops, this could also be affected by more extraction of mineral resources. Some candidates lacked specific scientific knowledge and often wrote a pre-prepared essay on Global Warming and pollution in general, often with errors and a lack of clarity in their understanding. Weaker answers also had a tendency to describe problems which were more relevant to the Social Domain, for example jobs, starvation and poverty.

F733 Domain Exploration: Applying Synoptic Skills

General Comments

A wide ability range of candidates showed a secure engagement with this paper. It was pleasing to note that Centres are now focused on the differing requirements of Section A and Section B. In Section A the majority of candidates responded to the 10 mark questions with an answer of approximately 250 words. Responses to the 20 mark question were longer and proportionately so. The better time management implied by this approach allowed for the essay of Section B to be properly planned and lucidly composed. There were almost no spoiled, illegible or facetious scripts. Prose was generally lucid. Examiners noted that punctuation is now almost universally confined to full stops and commas; possessive apostrophes continue their decline: paragraphs were often inserted after an answer had been completed.

There are positive signs that centres and candidates are recognising the balance of knowledge and skills that are needed to unlock the marks allocated under each assessment objective (AO) within the paper. Section A rewards skills (AO2 and AO4) with 35 marks out of 50. The knowledge base (AO1 and AO3) is essential but subordinate, earning the balance of 15 marks. Centres that ensure candidates are prepared with the requisite thinking skills, using material that also equips them with a secure knowledge base, will see a more positive outcome.

In Section B the knowledge required derives from a close study of the specification content and thinking skills are used more extensively than in Section A. It is pleasing to note that there is less evidence of answers that appear to have depended on candidates' sometimes limited experience and extra-curricular reading to more focused and structured responses that reveal a secure engagement with subject areas from the specification.

Section A

Question 1

The reading skills of candidates were tested by the double negative in the question, and their thinking skills required a secure focus to understand the relationship between age and political conviction. Most candidates scored half marks or more, although some of the assumptions made were naive. People do not grow more right wing as they age, nor does experience confer political acumen. Good answers equated 'heart' with idealism and 'head' with insight as well as relating both to age.

Question 2

Most candidates recognised the slant of the news story but often struggled to describe how it was done; this made the question an effective differentiator. The best answers assembled and summarised the facts in the article and then examined the way in which they had been modified by the mode of presentation. Weaker answers attempted a generalised critique of journalism. Candidates need to know that a concise focus on source material is the key to success in Section A.

Question 3

Distinguishing *subjective* from *socio-economic*, and from *scientific* proved to be an easy task though many candidates struggled to justify or support a chosen reason. This usually occurred as so few of them referred back to the question stem and the phrase 'choosing to buy.' That said many answers showed ingenuity and a wide range of reference in supporting the chosen statement. Approaches ranged from the philosophical to the practical via the sociological.

Question 4

Answers to this question provided a clear indicator of how many candidates had been skilfully prepared for the examination. Given the prompts in the question, few candidates mistook the nature of unstructured interviews or covert participant observation. However, examiners were very pleased with the way in which the strengths and weaknesses of these methods were described and evaluated. This was a question where technical vocabulary did little to enhance answers. Saying unstructured interviews are liable to show demand characteristics did no more for an answer than did the observation that an interviewee might wish to please a researcher: a synoptic approach in keeping with the paper.

Section B

Question 5

There were comparatively few responses to this question. However, there were some very thoughtful answers, generally from candidates whose specialised interests – music, theatre, dance, and fashion – enabled them to write from personal experience. These candidates considered the personal, cultural, economic, social, and medical purposes of their chosen art form often with a range of well-evidenced examples. Weaker answers tended to focus on popular music and its questionable (at best uneven) political or social influence, or gave details of the success of a favourite band. At all levels it was pleasing to note that candidates felt no inhibitions about attacking the key phrase in the source, 'music is just music'. One candidate described it as 'insulting and patronising to all art and all artists': one need not agree with this description to relish its vigour. Equally, another telling observation made was that 'art of all kinds gives us passion and enjoyment that transforms the duller areas of life'.

Question 6

This was the most popular question and, as such, produced the widest range of attainment. Less able candidates produced simplistic and superficial answers which usually attempted to turn the question into one examining the pros and cons of abortion. This was a complex question; only a complex answer could do it full justice. At the same time, it offered the candidates a topic which has been so often been aired in the media to provide them with a modest knowledge base. Such candidates presented a range of advantages which they then attempted to counter balance. This often resulted in stilted, repetitive answers which gave an impression of disengagement from this emotive topic.

The best answers often came from candidates who used personal experience to underpin their ideas. It was particularly pleasing that many candidates showed an unsentimental compassion towards disability, and also to note the very positive impact that the Paralympics has had on public sentiment. The role of AO3 examples was – as it often is in Section B – a key discriminator, as was the ability to see beyond screening as just an opportunity for termination. Weaker answers simply, and incorrectly, assumed that screening could 'cure' the disabilities. Many others also over-estimated the scope of such screening, asserting that such learning difficulties as autism could be detected by it.

Question 7

This was the least popular question. Not surprisingly, most of those who attempted it developed the grey area concerning what they saw as socially acceptable and minor crimes. Some good answers referred to Google and Starbucks as a contrast to the exaggeration of an insurance claim or for receiving too much change. Tax evasion featured in most answers and was often put in the context of the nation's financial problems and the fraudulent activities of MPs in claiming expenses to which they were not entitled. It was refreshing to read a range of answers to a question on crime that did not include a series of pointed criticisms of luxurious prison life. But at the same time, very few candidates examined the deeper issues that lay at the heart of the question such as the extent to which a criminal code should reflect a system of morality. That said, very few candidates dismissed the crimes cited in the questions as being 'victimless.'

F734 Culture, Science and Society: Making Connections

General Comments

Examiners were pleased with the mature approach displayed by the majority of candidates. They demonstrated a genuine desire to produce focused responses to the questions. The wide range of diverse answers offered good differentiation, and time management was generally good. General Studies questions often ask for details relating to personal experience and an understanding of these elements is being included with increased effectiveness. This was more evident in question 1, where candidates were able to relate experiences from their education or indeed their continuing participation in the Arts.

The quality of written communication remains a concern. The English language is one of the richest in terms of vocabulary and therefore it is disappointing to read vernacular phrases or slang within the formal arena of the examination. Additionally, there are still common errors in presentation, including the inaccurate repetition of elements of the source material and even the introduction of 'text speak.' The continual misspelling of common words remains a concern.

Question 1

The three sources covered aspects of attendance at arts events. The first showed attendance by region, gender, and ethnicity, the second highlighted the National Theatre Live performances, and the third commented on the centenary of Benjamin Britten's birth and events organised to celebrate this. Candidates were asked to consider the ways in which the three domains affected attendance at arts events, and to consider how attendance might develop over the next ten years. Stronger answers were able to use the source material as a springboard to discuss their ideas at length and in detail, introducing a range of their own thoughts and ideas. Weaker responses worked their way steadily through the source material and brought little or no original thoughts or ideas to their essay.

When considering the Cultural Domain, answers included reference to the changing attitudes and types of art as well as considering the influence of the media and advertising. Often answers reflected upon the importance of religion either in the creation of art or as an obstacle to viewing it as some beliefs object to displays of art. It was pleasing to see candidates use their experience of attending festivals such as Diwali or Eid or indeed the Chinese New Year to demonstrate a personal understanding of issues.

Social issues often related to those of costs, accessibility, education or family. These were seen as key reasons for fluctuating attendance. By linking ideas that originated in the Social Domain with those of the Cultural Domain candidates achieved good credit for making connections. The most common links made with the Scientific Domain used ipads, streaming and DVDs as reasons why people no longer physically attended performances. The stronger responses recognised the ability of science to ensure that attendance would not dwindle but offer the additional option of virtual attendance. It was surprising to note that some felt that the advent of cinema, in all its forms, had replaced theatre entirely.

The key to a good answer was to consider both parts of question concurrently through cross-referencing ideas on attendance. A common approach was to consider the question in separate parts offering a paragraph at the end of the essay as a general, personal conclusion. For many candidates, personal experience was interpreted as participation. To this end there were some good accounts of involvement in a wide range of arts such as drama, dance, choral singing, and playing a musical instrument (often to a high standard.) It was disappointing to note that Britten was unknown to many candidates, some believing that he was still alive and thus offering advice about how he should market himself in 2013.

Question 2

The three sources commented on the impact of science on the world. The first offered the opinion of many scientists towards the end of the nineteenth century, the second offered a list of inventions or discoveries which had occurred during the twentieth century, and the third spoke of the discovery of penicillin. Candidates were asked to outline the key features of one scientific discovery or invention and evaluate its impact on the three domains.

It is unfortunate to note that a significant number of candidates did not read the question fully and therefore could not access the high mark levels due to omissions. This may have been due to more than one scientific discovery being discussed in a superficial way. A wide range of discoveries was presented including: the wheel, splitting the atom, guns, steel, and vaccination. A less original approach was to choose one referred to in the source material. The inclusion of key features was well-rewarded but unfortunately this information was often missing in favour of a much more general, less specific discussion. More able candidates were able to consider a number of themes and developments as their essay progressed. A number of weaker answers often relied upon the invention of television and a description of the variety of programmes which are available.

In the Cultural Domain, an interesting idea sometimes emerged relating to the on-going tension between religion and scientific advances. At times this was discussed with real focus and expression, and evaluated the benefits and drawbacks in great detail. When considering transplant technology, moral issues formed a key point of many discussions. Social issues cited included the effects on the family, education and health, and some solid links were made with the Cultural Domain to enhance the answer. In the case of television many candidates considered it to be a benefit to society but then spoke at length about the way it was leading to a nation of 'couch potatoes' who would eventually create a drain on NHS resources as a result of heart failure and obesity. Scientific issues often centred on the invention or discovery itself and how this enabled other scientists to renew their determination to make new discoveries. There were some very good discussions about DNA research leading to GM produce, which was considered a benefit, and the development of 'cloning', which was not.

Some of the best answers discussed the splitting of the atom. Candidates recognised many of the advantages as well as the disadvantages of the discovery in a variety of ways that have both positive and negative effects on our world. This included the consideration of not only the devastation and destruction which this discovery had caused, but also the benefits to which it could be put in terms of power generation. Indeed the ability to consider the benefits and drawbacks of a discovery was a discriminating feature when considering the strength of an essay.

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