

GCE

General Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H479**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H079**

OCR Report to Centres June 2014

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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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F731 The Cultural and Social Domains

General Comments:

Examiners continue to be impressed by the level of thought and engagement which candidates display in their answers to such a wide range of questions across two domains. Centres appear to be adopting the approaches that have been recommended in previous reports in their tackling short and extended answers. It continues to be the case that the number of marks available for a question is the clearest indication of the amount of detail that is required to be given in the answer. For example, a six mark question that asks for two reasons suggests that each reason will be awarded up to three marks - consisting of a statement of the reason followed by a development of the idea(s) or an example(s). Similarly with reference to the construction of essays, those with a defined shape and sense of direction are most successful in maintaining the dialogue between the candidate and the assessor and, at the end of the journey, both parties are enlightened and amply rewarded (with knowledge or marks).

Conceptualised thinking and writing proved a challenge to many candidates. The explanation, discussion and illustration of conscience, creativity and originality caused some problems that could have easily been fixed by the inclusion of examples or scenarios. Examiners are only too aware that many candidates have had limited life experience and therefore they are fully expecting speculative or imagined situations to be presented in order to make a point more securely. In contrast, Centres are reminded that the inclusion of protracted and, at times irrelevant, anecdotes as part of an answer can prove to be an unwanted and unwelcome distraction from the main subject of the question and its focus.

Time management was generally very good and most candidates completed the examination within the two hours allowed. The standard of written communication was satisfactory though there continues to be evidence of poor spelling of even simple and common words, and even those which are printed in the examination paper. This is a challenging examination and the level of success observed by the examining team is a credit to the positive way in which both candidates and Centres are approaching their preparation and study.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A: The Cultural Domain

Question 1

The question was concerned with aspects of belief, and presented four separate opportunities to earn marks by considering a range of views and sources.

- ai) It was important to interpret the lyrics of Source A rather than simply restating them. By presenting some likely ideas, predictions, and scenarios it was possible to gain full marks assuming that each of the proposals had been supported by some explanation or an example to make the point clear. The question asked for two suggestions; with six marks being available this was a clear indication that more than a simple statement was required. Answers such as staying true to one's ambitions, never giving up, and despite life having its own way of developing, one should cling on to aspirations and dreams, were all common responses.

- aii) This proved to be quite a challenging question as it required candidates to comprehend the connection between belief and truth and thereby examine instances of when the connection became difficult to believe. The most common answers involved reference to doubting provenance, absence of evidence as well as other more personal views that were linked to family beliefs and upbringing. Once again some candidates failed to access full marks by not offering any reliable or extensive support and simply stating a single reason.
- b) It is possible that the reference to religion in the question stem stimulated candidates to include relevant examples and explanations in support of their views. As a consequence the question did perform well and interesting views and suggestions were proposed about shared beliefs and values. These included common rules, a sense of purpose and/or community, and a way of providing stability amongst the group.
- c) Each of the quotations offered candidates a different route to explain the author's view and to present a personal opinion. Failure to complete both tasks meant that it was not possible to gain full marks. Some answers spent too long on interpretation and very little or no space on personal views. It was important to offer some illustration that might have been a combination of the candidate's and the author's views on belief. Gary Spence's quotation proved to be the most popular choice largely due to the suggestion that belief is restricting and shuts out other possibilities through its imposed restrictions. However, there were some discerning and articulate discussions of the other two options. When handled logically and succinctly any interpretation, supported by some personal conjecture, provided the ideal answer to the question. By simply presenting assertive statements that failed to include balance and objectivity candidates seriously restricted their marks. Questions with a higher mark tariff invariably include marks for communication (in this case up to four marks). Many answers showed admirable clarity and fluency whereas a lack of care in the construction of ideas and sentences coupled with unreliable spelling saw the marks available being restricted.

Section B: The Cultural Domain

Question 2

The question required an interpretation of the quotation cited in the stem. This was sometimes quite clearly explained but on other occasions there was some difficulty in defining conscience. This seemed to be caused by a lack of experience rather than an understanding of the question. Those candidates that linked a clear conscience to a bad memory engaged with the question and were able to describe instances where conscience played a key role in a variety of life experiences and dilemmas. It remained consistent that the candidates who supplied examples and used these to develop their answers received marks in the high levels. What remained disappointing is that when considering the matter of extent, candidates did not consider ways of attaining a clear conscience such as a confession or serving a prison sentence (thereby showing remorse for a crime) or something as simple as facing someone, in person, to offer an apology. This was not a popular question but when it was answered well it provided an ample platform for candidates to display their erudition.

Question 3

This proved to be the most popular question in Section B. The mere mention of 'on-line' seems to trigger an avalanche of answers from candidates who feel that they are experts due to them being owners and users of a variety of electronic resources. However, the question was primarily concerned with the place of the traditional newspaper and whether it could still retain its place in an ever more demanding world. Essentially candidates were free to examine the benefits of both on-line media and printed newspapers but a very good answer required some reasoned explanation of the relative worth and position of each rather than simply listing ideas. Examiners

were looking for balance and fairness concluding with a personal viewpoint; it is quite natural to expect this outcome as a conclusion to any discussion. A common contrast made was the immediacy and instant actuality of on-line media as compared to the more considered reporting, involving greater research and depth, of a newspaper article.

Question 4

It proved a struggle to provide a convincing answer to this question unless there was evidence of some discussion of the concepts of creativity and originality. A successful approach involved the use of examples from one of the Arts, the most popular being music and painting. In so doing candidates were able to look at the degrees to which artists are original or how much of their work is in fact generic and influenced by others. A popular notion was that of reassembly: the same elements being used (chords, colours, metrical layout) and being rearranged in a new way. Once again, a question about the Arts proved unattractive to candidates and seemed to be the province of A level Art and Music students.

Section C: The Social Domain

Question 5

The question was concerned with aspects of tension and harmony, and presented four separate opportunities to earn marks by considering a range of views and a source.

- a) Three separate phrases, taken from Source C, were offered to candidates for them to express their own meaning and interpretation. It was important to ensure that any expression of meaning related to the passage and therefore some connection to the riots was essential to gain full marks. Candidates who chose to simply translate each word, in the manner of a language exercise, missed the point of the question and were awarded few marks.
- b) It was a quite straightforward process for candidates to pick out one of the suggestions made in the passage. As it turned out, many answers reached full marks by adding some supporting idea after the selection of one way in which our 'sick' and 'broken' society could be mended. Two marks were available for communication and most candidates wrote in an informed and fluent way.
- c) The words tension and harmony form important parts of the question. A very good answer involved more than simply outlining the rules of a candidate's school or college and using their answer as an opportunity to offload criticism of policy. Indeed the question does ask for examples of rules but this needed to be supported by examples of purpose and effectiveness which would naturally relate to tension and harmony. The elements of safety, security, a sense of belonging and responsibility, and fairness would naturally link to ways of reducing tension, promoting harmony and preparing students for their future life. Answers that developed some of these themes were invariably engaging and interesting. Up to four marks were available for communication and candidates were able to display their writing skills effectively by producing fluent and balanced responses.

Section D: The Social Domain

Question 6

The question does highlight the fact that the EU has suffered problems over recent years. It would seem reasonable to expect a good answer to highlight some of these problems. In reality many candidates simply imagined that this question was concerned with whether the UK should remain in the EU or not. Since the examination took place around the time of local and European elections there were some quite assertive and spirited viewpoints about the approach of some politicians and their parties (some candidates even managing to link EU membership to Scottish devolution – the topic of question 7). Whilst Examiners welcomed responses that looked at the cases for staying in and leaving the EU it was important to place these responses in some context as well as looking at the EU's position as a contrast. Many essays were negative and assertive with a tendency to focus on issues of immigration and the Pound. There were few references to the military implications or the loss of trade links, environmental co-operation and the major issue of peace between member countries.

Question 7

Some candidates wrote with patriotic passion whereas others clearly did not understand the implication of a 'yes' vote for the Scottish people. This issue is contemporary and current; Examiners were surprised by how little candidates knew about its dynamics or cared about the consequences. This was further displayed by how few candidates attempted the question. It was quite a straightforward question that was essentially about the advantages and disadvantages of the separation of Scotland from the UK. Sadly, the more serious points were reserved for a few very good essays where the demands of the Scottish people who believe passionately in autonomy and the end to rule from London. Examiners were faced with some answers that talked about wearing kilts, manning the borders to repel invaders and other such fanciful and frivolous ideas. It was a pity to see some candidates treating what is such a fundamental and historical change so lightly. Having said that; it was equally refreshing to read balanced, considered and logical responses that examined the consequences of separation from both economic and social perspectives.

Question 8

In reading so many answers to this overwhelmingly popular questions it was puzzling to note the number of candidates who thought that it was compulsory for them to attend school until the age of eighteen. This was even more perplexing since the question quite clearly states that this is a proposal not a law. Having said that the majority of essays were logically structured and provided evidence to support the suggestions for and against the proposal. Once again, in order to reach the higher mark levels there had to be an examination of both sides of the issue and some consideration of a personal viewpoint in the conclusion. To simply list ideas without discussion would mean that marks would be automatically restricted. A view of the proposal's significance to the education system and to society as a whole (socially and economically) would be important inclusions. However, to simply suggest that making students remain in education would mean an more intelligent workforce to reduce unemployment was an unrealistic suggestion; Examiners would have expect to see some balance of ideas by referring to those students who would reject education and become disruptive as well as the notion that there is no guarantee that the education offered would match the skills shortage.

F732 The Scientific Domain

General Comments

The overall performance of candidates, including the quality of their written communication, was very good. It was clear that time had been used well with many responses to Section B providing evidence of this.

The course content of this unit involves the use of mathematical skills which are included in GCSE courses. In Section A, some questions required an understanding and an explanation of number patterns. Candidates who found these patterns did not always ensure they supported them well enough with an example or an explanation.

In Section B, examiners noted the use of clear communication skills and good vocabulary especially when examples and personal experience were included. A large number of candidates were able to demonstrate a range of knowledge learned from their General Studies course, from other AS courses, and their own personal life experience. It was particularly pleasing to see fewer rubric errors.

As has been highlighted in previous reports there were instances where candidates had not taken into account the key words of their chosen essay question. In Question 3 some responses described advantages rather than disadvantages; in Question 4, two areas needed to be chosen and an argument presented favouring one over the other. A few candidates failed to make this choice and proceeded to describe both areas. Finally, in Question 5, the stem of the question referred to both space and the earth, however some answers referred to only one of these areas.

In general, introductions to essays appeared to have improved and showed a clearly defined thought process as a prelude to the main body of the essay. Some of these introductions were too lengthy or simply repeated the question.

Assessment Objective 4 (Communication) is assessed throughout the paper and attention must be paid to the presentation, style and coherence of essays, particularly in Section B. Only a small number of responses displayed poor handwriting skills.

Section A

Question 1

The theme of this question involved the understanding of the use of formulae and data handling.

- ai This part of the question was well answered with only a minority of candidates forgetting to answer to 2 decimal places. There were very few answers seen where the candidate had used the incorrect numbers for 'N' and 'n'.
- aii Here it was crucial that candidates realised that the needle could only land on the line a whole number of times. Some candidates who showed good mathematical skills then forgot this important part of the question, hence their response was not awarded the full 4 marks.

However, most responses seen were correct and the answer of '48' was shown clearly. Candidates must remember when they are rounding off at the end of a response that their final answer must be shown clearly. A few candidates who had provided untidy calculations simply crossed out the answer the calculator had given them and adjusted it to show '48'.

There was evidence that a few candidates had not read the stem of the question carefully and substituted either '2.85cm' or '85' in error.

- b The question asked candidates to 'describe two trends', however a few candidates simply offered a description of where the line was at certain points on the graph. This did not constitute a trend and no marks were awarded for this.

A few candidates described a trend, for example, 'The line rises dramatically then evens out as more needles are dropped' but did not link their response to a particular set. However, there were some very good answers seen where candidates had correctly stated that the more times the needle was dropped, the closer all the lines came to 3.14, the value for pi.

Candidates were clear in their responses and other trends were noted, for example that the gaps between the sets were larger at the beginning or that sets 1 and 3 were almost opposite in their trend, almost like a mirror image.

This question included an assessment of AO4 (Communication) and candidates should be encouraged to express their response clearly rather than, in a few cases, as note form.

- c There were some very good answers to this part showing that candidates had a clear understanding of the use of the computer program. Most responses included reference to the fact that the computer could do more in terms of time and number of drops than a human. Also, it was noted that the computer would know exactly where the needle had landed, rather than the problem of parallax which a human would encounter. The fact that the computer could alter the height or width of the lines to provide a more complex experiment was suggested.

Environmental factors and equipment problems were commented on in terms of the human completing the experiment. Weaker answers often included some repetition, or the candidate only noted one or two brief points without clarification or development. AO4 (Communication) was also assessed in this part of the question so candidates should be encouraged to write their ideas concisely and clearly. Where low marks were awarded for this part of the question for AO4, candidates had been unclear in the expression of their response or they had simply given brief points.

Question 2

This question involved the understanding and explanation. Many different patterns emerged, for example:

- a Candidates generally showed good skills in this part of the question, providing clear working out and accurate calculations. In a few responses where a candidate had failed to give 2 decimal places for the money units, only 3 of the 4 marks could be awarded. Candidates are reminded that where units appear in a question, then the accuracy must reflect the unit.

However, in weaker responses even though 'monthly' appeared in bold text on the question some candidates omitted to consider this, so their final answer was £637.50. It would have been useful at this point if these candidates had thought more about what that implied as it would have been a very large monthly payment. The stem of the question is very important and candidates should be encouraged to read it carefully.

A few candidates could not work out the percentage, some without a calculator, however there were many instances where the calculation had been completed in steps, 10%, 5%, 2.5% and 1%. These answers were then compiled into a correct answer for 8.5%.

- b There were some very interesting ways provided for working out the answer to this logic question.

Candidates could see that each lecturer only shook hands 8 times, as they did not shake their own hand. This generally led to a grid or a list of times they shook hands, including reference to:

$8 + 7 + 6 + 5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1$ and hence the correct answer of 36.

A few answers were seen where the candidate had not added this list correctly and often gave 35 as the answer, or they had omitted the '1' at the end. In some cases it was possible to award a few marks for a grid which clearly showed that the candidate had started to eliminate a few possibilities, this is the bonus of providing some working out.

Another method which was commonly seen was a circular diagram using lines to join the lecturers. A few candidates however, having said that there were 8 handshakes each then completed their answer by $9 \times 8 = 72$.

It was obvious from some of the weaker responses that candidates had not taken note of the 4 marks allocated for the question and where their answer was incorrect, they had not provided working out which was clear and organised so it could be checked.

Section B

Question 3

There were some discerning candidates who very effectively used the opportunity to apply their scientific knowledge in the area of controlling disease. Their chosen methods included vaccination, quarantine, education, border control, access to clean water and increased hygiene.

Very good answers included a range of examples for each method chosen alongside some assessment of that method. Examples for vaccination were measles and the MMR vaccination, and assessment included the fact that not all disease could be controlled in this way and also that the availability of vaccines and the cost, would be prohibitive in some developing countries. Where quarantine was dealt with, responses sometimes referred to the plague, and the assessment was dealt with very well in terms of how hard it would be to contain people, where it might be possible to contain them and the effect on human rights.

Education was a very popular method chosen, suggestions that it might start at a very young age, that the media was a good way of completing this education, it did not just have to be in schools or colleges. When this method was assessed, it was clear that candidates thought that, despite what the education via the media was, it would not be the case that everyone could access it, again in developing countries.

Malaria and mosquito net, along with the idea of tackling the vector of the disease provided some good responses. A few candidates developed their ideas on controlling diseases in animals and plants.

In weaker responses, candidates usually only described better hygiene, but this was often repeated in terms of washing hands, blowing noses and wearing face masks. There were some far-fetched ideas of quarantining people on boats or islands.

Question 4

No comment

Question 5

Very good essays addressed the idea of sustainability, sometimes offering a definition of it at the beginning and commenting on environmental problems related to the future.

Candidates were very conscious of our carbon footprint and the idea of a short term fix in some cases. Assessment of the different choices usually involved the disadvantages of that particular choice.

The use of renewable energy was popular for the most effective, candidates argued that we would always have wind, solar and tidal power but suggested that we may need to improve on the ways in which we harness it and where we do. They suggested that it was not sustainable in terms of different locations around the world, so we need to research that aspect. Many responses hinged their assessment on the idea that fossil fuels were being depleted so we need to use renewable energy more.

Where cleaner fuels were suggested there were several examples of hybrid cars and candidates appeared to have a good knowledge of new innovations in progress for the further use of these. Energy efficiency related mostly to light bulbs but some candidates suggested that should we use it as a most likely effective option, but that we need to complete more research. It was generally seen as a short term fix and would work better in conjunction with other energy sources in the future.

Weaker responses simply used renewable energy and offered an essay on global warming. This was one of the creditworthy points, but not if the majority of the response was focussed on it. Although the question asked candidates to choose two options, a few described all four and made a decision at the end of the essay. This was acceptable when it was very clear what was intended. However, in weaker responses, either this decision was not made or the candidate had simply written everything they knew about renewable energy in its different forms.

F733 Domain Exploration – Applying Synoptic Skills

General Comments:

Most candidates engaged well with this paper, taking it seriously and making conscientious efforts to meet its demands. Many of them had evidently been prepared by Centres providing focused and structured teaching towards the examination. Many candidates engaged thoroughly with the format of the paper, writing focused and concise answers for Section A. This sound examination technique allowed them time and space to develop a longer essay answer for Section B.

The structure of the examination booklet has helped many candidates to tailor their answers to an appropriate length in Section A. A substantial minority of candidates found their answers over-running the space available. They need to realise that they are probably writing at greater length, or in more detail, than is required. This miscalculation was particularly noticeable in word processed scripts, where there is no limitation of space to alert candidates to the length of their answers.

Many candidates' spelling, punctuation and grammar were adequate for their purposes, but the use of the possessive apostrophe continues to decline, as does usage of the colon and semi-colon. Paragraphing in the short answer questions was often helpful, with candidates evidently using the question structure as a pattern. The regular use of word processors in schools and colleges probably accounts for the fact that candidates' handwriting occasionally deteriorated beyond legibility as their scripts proceeded. Centres could enhance their candidates' preparation for the examination by giving them opportunities to write timed essays in longhand.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No. 1

Candidates found this question accessible, often deducing from first principles secure observations about the location and the time referenced in the extract. Many of them referred (correctly) to industrialised towns in settings such as the Pennines in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Derbyshire. Equally, many answers cited the “pall of black smoke” as evidence of industries heavily dependent on coal. Candidates who referenced this fact often went on to develop points concerning air pollution and its effect on health. This provided a useful pivot in their answers to the second part of the question concerning life in the period described. More able candidates picked up the reference to factory shutdowns and wrote briefly about Wakes Weeks and similar customs in the mill towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Similarly, candidates who used specialist knowledge to refer briefly to the conditions of working class life in the late Industrial Revolution were credited when they were able to relate their comments to the source.

It is important in questions of this kind for candidates to confine themselves to deductions which can be plausibly inferred from the source. Candidates who speculated about [eg] the nature of family life during the period in question often went beyond this boundary.

Question No. 2

This question asked candidates to identify and evaluate the logic deployed in three statements about corporal punishment in schools. Engagement with this question was often secure and perceptive. Candidates identified ably the strengths and weaknesses of Statement 1, balancing the professional expertise of the teachers surveyed and their empirical observations of classroom behaviour with their relatively low support for corporal punishment. The evaluation of Statement 2 often made a crucial difference to the quality of this answer. Candidates who took this statement at its apparent face value thought that the correlation of the statement was in fact causation and this mistake often impaired their answers. Many others, however, correctly identified this example of the *post hoc fallacy*, although rarely by its technical name. Statement 3 was more confidently dealt with, with the weakness of an unsubstantiated personal opinion ably balanced with the authority and experience behind it.

This question also exposed, perhaps more often than it should have done, a flaw in candidates' examination technique. Quite a few candidates contested the rank order, and those who did so usually said, wrongly, that Statement 2 was the strongest. They were not penalised for this error, but its commission meant that they often evaluated both Statements 1 and 2 less capably than they could have done and this was reflected in the mark awarded. This error can only have arisen from an inattentive reading of the question.

Question No. 3

Most candidates found this question accessible and found it straightforward to answer by making relatively simple, common-sense observations. These referred to technological difficulties caused by the statue's height, weight, configuration, its position on a windy hillside and the effects of weathering on its materials. Of the three short answer questions, this was the one on which candidates most often scored half marks or a little more. Better answers referred to the problems caused by the statue's high centre of gravity, the narrow base on which it had to stand, and the effect of torsion caused by strong winds.

Some candidates apparently found the reference to technology hard to cope with, and wrote of such matters as planning permission, local objections to the statue's erection and its vulnerability to low flying aircraft.

Question No. 4

When answering this question, candidates needed to achieve a secure balance between evaluating the material in the source and arguing the points made by it. In fact this was a straightforward data response question. It was emphatically not a question about religious belief. Candidates were asked to evaluate seven statements about religious belief, from a characteristically vigorous newspaper article by Professor Richard Dawkins. The fact that Professor Dawkins was not credited as the article's author encouraged candidates to reply with equal vigour.

As a result this question produced many answers in which candidates evaluated the source critically, occasionally waspishly and usually with relish. Candidates clearly saw what was variously defensible, arguable and plain wrong in this series of statements, and the best answers often showed the same focus and attack as the original. Some candidates guessed at the authorship of the article [those who did not identify Professor Dawkins usually cited the late Christopher Hitchens] and pointed out that these statements did not meet their rationalist criterion of always using evidence-based reasoning.

Many candidates also picked up AO3 marks in this answer by making relevant reference to their own beliefs. Some also achieved this by knowledgeable reference to such faith systems as Buddhism and its inherent pacifism.

A data response question using material about which candidates probably hold strong views often elicits unevenly focused answers, and this one was no exception. Many candidates wrote answers in which the focus shifted from evaluation to argument and back again, and these were often awarded marks straddling the boundaries of Level 2 and Level 3. The weakest answers were those who simply agreed with the statements and offered their own illustrations – often knowledgeably – of what they proposed. This was a failure of examination technique as much as it was a failure of understanding: candidates need to remember that the command word “Evaluate” signifies a challenge to find both merits and defects in the material being interrogated.

Section B

Question No. 5

Surprisingly, perhaps, this was not as popular a question as might have been expected. The issues raised by the source and described in the mark scheme had, fortuitously, been given additional point by the Leveson enquiry, the phone-hacking scandal and the then recently-concluded trial of journalists and editorial staff of the *News of the World*. The relatively small number of candidates who attempted this question often made use of this material and other recent examples of the media operating under apparently elastic moral constraints.

Successful response to this question – as in all essay questions based on a source – often depends on the candidates’ being able to deconstruct the source in such a way as to make a scaffold for the answer. This implies in turn that time spent in planning is rarely wasted, and this was clearly demonstrated by the answers to this question.

The best answers were those who took the issues raised – implicitly or explicitly – by the source, subjected them to informed analysis and evaluation and reached a balanced conclusion, which was often the truism that as consumers we get the media that we deserve. Less able candidates related the moralities referenced in the source and related them to other media issues, often producing answers which made up for a relative lack of depth by possessing scope and offering a wide range of examples.

Weaker responses confined themselves to re-cycling the source and offering straightforward, sometimes simplistic comment on it. What was notable about even these less accomplished answers was the more or less universal cynicism about the values of the media they expressed. Although our young people are omnivorous consumers of a wide variety of media, it is evident that their consumption is far from being uncritical.

Question No. 6

This was by far the most popular question, and, as such, attracted the widest range of attainment, with the bulk of answers occupying the middle ground of the mark-range. The weakness of many answers was a failure to deal with its synoptic aspect. The achievements and progress of science impinge as much on our cultural and social life as they do on our access to sophisticated medical treatment. Whilst many answers referred to the ethical dilemmas which often result from scientific progress, relatively few broadened these references effectively. Those who did often referred to the effect on family and community life of social media, or the cultural impact of internet shopping on town centres slowly emptying of retail outlets.

Most answers however concentrated on the enumeration of a range of examples of scientific progress in various fields, and the more or less focused evaluation of the benefits and drawbacks of this progress. In doing so, the scientific area most often referenced was medicine, with many candidates writing knowledgeably of genetic engineering, in vitro-fertilisation, cancer treatment and progress in the treatment of such diseases as cystic fibrosis and other essentially genetic disorders. Many middle range candidates tended to concentrate on the physical benefits

of such progress whilst contrasting this with the ethical fall-out which often follows in its wake, such as “designer babies”, eugenics and the prolongation of life past the point where it possesses any quality.

This was a question which encouraged and allowed for a wide variety of approaches, and equally competent answers were produced by candidates who adopted a case-study approach. Notable among these were answers dealing with dissonances between pure and applied science. These often cited such examples as Louis Feiser, who invented napalm as well as several lifesaving drugs, and Fritz Haber, whose Nobel Prize-winning researches into nitrogen-based fertilisers which revolutionised agriculture were contrasted with his invention of Zyklon B, the gas later used in the “Final Solution to the Jewish problem”.

As well as varied approaches, this question catered for less able candidates who produced answers listing a variety of scientific inventions with simple comments on their benefits and drawbacks.

The popularity of this question is perhaps reflected in the widely various approaches candidates adopted in answering it. At the same time it is evident that the security of scientific general knowledge, particularly among candidates who are not studying Science A levels, is very uneven. Candidates regularly confused the issue of global warming with damage to the ozone layer, and several also claimed that cloned human beings were a fact rather than a possibility. That said, the questioning attitude to scientific progress revealed by the answers to this question is, on the whole, an encouraging omen.

Question No. 7

This was the least popular of the essay questions, but it attracted the strongest set of responses. Most candidates who attempted it did so on a secure knowledge base from which they cited both historical [suffragist, Gandhi’s Salt March, Martin Luther King and the US Civil Rights’ campaign] and contemporary examples [Fathers for Justice, University Tuition Fees, Travellers’ Camps and the English Defence League].

The topic itself led those who attempted the question into sensitive ethical areas – all essentially embodied in the central question of ends justifying means, and whether this question can be qualified either by the nobility of the ends or the legality of the means. It was an area often handled confidently by candidates in their answers. This may have been a function of the fact that candidates recognised the need for a wide knowledge base in dealing with this question, with the result that less able candidates steered clear of it.

However that may have been, there were many answers that also scored well on AO3, where candidates cited interesting and challenging personal experience in support of their views. There were, however, some examples where candidates appeared to misread the significance and nature of the events on which they relied to make a point. The 2012 London riots, for example, though triggered by the death of a young man at the hands of the police, developed into civil disorder and criminal activity on a large scale which had little if anything to do with that initial tragic event. Similarly, some candidates appeared to think that such legal entitlements as free speech could be qualified so as to be denied to organisations of which they did not approve.

Such misapprehensions were relatively rare, however, and most of the responses to this question showed not only knowledge and understanding but an entirely welcome degree of tolerance and inclusiveness.

F734 Culture, Science and Society: Making Connections

General Comments:

It was pleasing to note that, as in previous years, the vast majority of candidates were well prepared for essay writing and there were some very good responses.

Each question has two parts: the first to demonstrate knowledge, and use experience to construct a response which includes the three domains and the second part to consider the extent of an issue. It is disappointing to note that a number of weaker candidates continue to copy or paraphrase material from the source thus limiting their opportunity to access the higher marks. While the source is offered as a springboard for answers, it is not intended to be regurgitated as a complete response. Too often the second part of the question is either ignored or receives simplistic and unqualified assertions at the end, almost as an afterthought. In order to access the higher marks it is important for Candidates to consider both aspects of the question in equal part.

It was pleasing to note that during this session Candidates were able to spread their time evenly between both questions. There were very few instances which demonstrated that Candidates had 'run out of time'. Equally, it was pleasing to note that there were very few 'spoiled' responses containing matter which bore no relevance to the topics in the questions.

Examiners continue to be concerned about the quality of communication. Perennially there are comments within the reports about the quality of handwriting, spelling, paragraphing and punctuation, but this year a vast increase in the use of vernacular, slang, and swear words has been noticed. While the examination is not testing the construction of English language, Candidates should be reminded that while there may be many different approaches to the spoken word, there is a formality to the written word in documents such as the examination script.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.1

The question contained two sources: one which outlined some of the work of UN peacekeeping forces; and the other a quote from Kennedy about needing to prepare for war in order to maintain peace. Candidates were asked to discuss the factors from the domains which needed to be considered by those who seek to maintain peace in areas recovering from war, and then to discuss to what extent any peacekeeping force can be effective. This question offered the opportunity for good differentiation of candidates.

A pleasing number of Candidates showed a good understanding of peacekeeping missions and used recent examples to support and illustrate their work. Those Candidates accessing the higher marks incorporated the ideas from each source using it as a 'springboard' and also discussed the extent of effectiveness by comparing specific examples of peacekeeping.

Weaker responses gave very general ideas about war and peace without really showing any knowledge of the United Nations or what a peacekeeping force means. The weakest responses lacked clarity, and often considered a 'fluffy' notion of peacekeeping as involving fun days, or activities such as 'The Big Lunch' rather than being able to consider what day-to-day needs might be for people living in areas recovering from war, and how these might be provided.

One method of differentiating between the responses was by the inclusion of examples. The stronger answer included examples of places where peacekeeping activities have taken place or are still continuing, and a description of activities. These included examples such as Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Bosnia to name a few. Weaker responses were sometimes able to identify activities in general terms, such as medical assistance, but were unable to elaborate on exactly what this might be, provision of clean drinking water, inoculations, for example.

Common themes within the Cultural domain related to religion, equality, rights for oppressed groups, and attitudes of different groups. Most often there was a discussion about the need for peacekeeping forces to be aware of the culture and norms of the society they were to assist in recovery. This often focussed on attitudes to women, and the use of women in the peacekeeping forces.

The Scientific domain tended to include medical provision such as inoculation, vaccination, provision of clean drinking water and sanitation. Discussion also revolved around the creation, maintenance, or demobilising of weaponry, and the clearing of landmines. Often the topic of reconstruction of transport, housing and other services was included here.

Discussion in the social domain tended to include the issues of costs, education, loss of family, and returning refugees to their homes. When discussing this domain a majority of Candidates were able to establish connections. This was particularly evident when considering costs and the prioritising of other activities such as provision of medical care versus providing shelter and re-building homes.

Where the extent of effectiveness was considered Candidates were able to recognise that some aspects of peacekeeping might be more successful than others. The responses gaining higher levels were able to compare and contrast peacekeeping activities and make value judgements about their effectiveness in relation to the purpose of the UN. Weaker responses were usually only able to articulate a negative opinion suggesting that war was inevitable.

Question No.2

This question asked Candidates to read the source and then discuss the extent to which it was desirable to move towards a paperless society. The discussion required consideration of all the domains.

This question was often answered very well. Candidates were able to offer a lot of detail especially when focusing on the benefits of the internet and technological equipment. The responses accessing higher marks were able to offer contrasting points and offer an evaluation in relation to desirability of moving towards a paperless system. Other responses took the notion of paperless to a literal extent and discussed issues relating to bitcoins, or toilet paper. The weakest responses often resembled a list of an advantage followed by a disadvantage with little development or example to support the points raised.

Within the cultural domain discussion often centred on the use of texts in differing religions and what attitudes might be to the use of, for example, a kindle to access readings from the Koran or the Torah. Often the Amish community was used as an example against the move towards a paperless society. More able Candidates were able to offer a discussion about the ways in which these and other groups would be excluded from society as a whole, while weaker responses merely made reference to them. The elderly and those with disabilities were often cited as examples of other groups who might be excluded if a paperless society existed. Very often the issues of changing traditions were discussed in relation to birthday cards, wrapping paper and letter writing. Here weaker responses were emotional rather than analytical. Of concern to

Examiners was the number of Candidates who assumed that a move to a paperless society would mean an end to writing and publishing.

The discussion in the scientific domain often related to different types of technology available and the issues of hacking. Most often issues relating to internet banking were raised. The better responses were able to introduce specific and relevant examples to support their argument. These included Ebay, the Pentagon, 'wiki-leaks, and the 'heartbleed virus'. More articulate answers were able to recognise the advantages of paperless systems in some circumstances such as the transfer of records and information within hospitals. Some responses also recognised that hacking and online protection were akin to a 'chicken and egg' in that developments in one would automatically lead to developments in the other. Virtually all Candidates were able to recognise that a reduction in the use of paper would herald some benefits in relation to the environment. More able Candidates recognised that while there might be improvements in relation to deforestation, there would be increases in the use of power to generate the technology to operate paperless systems. However the weaker responses concentrated too much on the issue of 'saving trees' and other endangered species.

The social domain included discussion about the changes to education and its benefits or drawbacks. Here there were plenty of pertinent personal examples. These often revolved around the advantages of kindles or e-readers for background reading against the advantages of preparing mind maps and paper based notes for revision. Typically the management of the examination system in a paperless society was also discussed. Another topic often considered was that of the costs involved in such a move. Here weaker responses often attacked Gordon Brown's announcement as short sighted rather than outlining and discussing the other costs which might be involved such as additional funds for awareness-raising or installation of broadband across the whole country. Discussion relating to this domain regularly offered opportunity for links to be made with other domains.

While a number of Candidates were able to offer positive and negative aspects, only those accessing higher marks were able to evaluate the desirability of a move towards a paperless society. These responses often made an evaluation after considering each domain; others weighed up the advantages and disadvantages and then drew a conclusion. The weaker responses tended to offer positives and negatives and then pronounce a judgment without discussion.

By far the most common mistake in a number of weaker responses was to ignore the focus of the question and instead answer one relating to the benefits of technology, or describing general internet issues.

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