

## **General Studies**

Advanced GCE A2 H479

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H079

# **OCR Report to Centres**

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**January 2012**

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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

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the challenges posed by the questions were positively embraced in their many different forms, and there was evidence of mature, perceptive and engaging responses, there are issues that need to be addressed in order to improve overall candidate performance.

The content of the specification is clearly set out and available from OCR. It is disappointing that some candidates show little evidence of preparation for the examination, as can be seen by their efforts and unsolicited comments. In particular, the Arts and politics are major omissions from the knowledge of many candidates. This was clear in the responses to essays set in Unit F731. Centres should spend some time looking at past papers and matching the number of marks available to the time that should be spent in composing and writing an answer. Weakness in this area resulted in a failure to complete the examination within the time allowed.

In Unit 732 it is important to include scientific knowledge and some justification for the ideas presented in order to gain high marks. Indeed, examiners saw evidence of apparent 'skim reading' of questions which clearly led to misunderstanding of the question rubric. However, it was clear that mathematical skills are generally good and improving session by session.

Time management has always been a concern, since some questions are awarded only a single mark, without the advantages of subdivisions within the question. However, in Unit 733, there was a marked improvement in the responses to Section A, where time is of the essence. Candidates are beginning to tease out details and reasoning in a complex way, though over-reliance on anecdotal evidence should be avoided. The questions offer an opportunity to look at a topic from different perspectives, possibly supported by personal experience.

Both Units 733 and 734 are synoptic. Therefore it is important to make links between the cultural, scientific and social domains. Making interesting connections using examples offers the opportunity to gain the highest marks; however, Centres should advise candidates not to digress from the question set by engaging in a protracted and irrelevant personal account that is subjective and distracts from the case being presented.

Quality of communication continues to be a major cause for concern. This can be helped by carefully planning answers and allowing enough time for review before the end of the examination. Candidates are expected to write in a formal manner appropriate to the academic standards of advanced level study; they should not consider that this subject is in any way different to others. There are numbers of candidates who write informally and, at times, in the vernacular seemingly showing the questions and their responses little respect.

Overall, the standard of performance remains steady and it is encouraging to see that Centres are becoming more familiar with the demands of the examination and the layout of the papers.

## F731 The Cultural and Social Domains

### General Comments

The examination was approached with enthusiasm by most candidates, providing a range of interesting and engaging answers that showed a good understanding of the demands of the questions. Some candidates delighted examiners with the sophistication of their vocabulary and expression as well as the range of their knowledge and their ability to construct a reasoned and coherent case. This was especially pleasing given that responses are produced in limited time in examination conditions and on unprepared topics which may lie wholly or partially outside their subject experience. However, General Studies does have a clearly defined specification in which there are full details of the subject areas from which examiners will draw in the setting of questions.

It is important that candidates are made aware of the range of topics that may be included if they are to have the chance to reach the highest marks and grades; in some scripts there was evidence of little or no preparation for this examination. There was a notable increase in the number of scripts that infringed rubric requirements; these included answering all of the essays in Sections B and D as well as an unhealthy increase of confessions by candidates that they were unsure of what was required of them.

Centres are reminded that there are on line resources available via the OCR website, as well as published books and support material, to help in the delivery of an effective course. Additionally, OCR organises INSET training for teachers of General Studies each year that address issues of course organisation, content and exemplar candidate responses to previous examination questions.

It continues to be a concern to examiners that many candidates are seemingly unused to producing essay style answers in examination conditions. Too few grasp the importance of outlining their understanding of the question or working within a clear structure leading to a conclusion. Too much reliance is placed on unsupported assertion and generalisation, without any specific examples or evidence to support and illustrate the points made. On the other hand, when matters of organisation and time management are given due consideration, the outcome can be very impressive.

Quality of written communication continues to be a concern, with a number of scripts struggling to communicate points clearly, usually through a combination of factors such as poor spelling and vocabulary (including of words provided on the question paper), weak sentence structure and lack of organisation. Finally, a number of overarching issues need highlighting:

- avoid lengthy, rambling, fictional accounts that do not really add to quality of the response to the question but detract from the key areas of discussion
- include assertions only if they are supported with reference to specific examples and evidence
- ensure that any facts used to support answers are correct – there is notable increase in facts being introduced that are fundamentally wrong
- whilst there are some introductions to essays, these are often brief and not well developed. Conclusions are too often simply a repeat of what is in the body of the essay, rather than some personal preference, insight or speculation.

## Comments on Individual Questions

### Section A

#### Question 1

- a) Sensible ideas on ‘manipulation’ of internet information were proposed but these did not always explain why this might be dangerous. There was good use of the recent *Wikileaks* issues and the inclusion of well-informed points about dangers of internet fraud and identity theft.
- b) There were some very general answers on the uses of the internet (rather than focusing on participation in its development), but some interesting examples about government surveys, medical advice sites and holiday reviews in which the public had been able to offer opinions or to improve the accuracy of existing information provided good illustrations to the ideas that were presented.
- c) Most candidates understood the importance of the accurate checking of information which, if were not carried out, could lead to loss of a reporter’s reputation or job.
- d) The source tended to be ignored in favour of general discussion about internet relationships. However it was pleasing to read perceptive observations based on the actions of the two figures, for example the fact that some might be unwilling to be dragged into the reality of a physical relationship or that such relationships might result in bullying. It was also suggested that successful partnerships or friendships could result in ‘real’ life through making contact by the internet.
- e) Very few candidates seemed to understand exactly what an *information sheet* was. Many wrote mini essays which went into great detail on one or two points whilst others offered only thin brief lists of bullet points. Nevertheless there was ample evidence of a considerable knowledge of advantages and disadvantages of social networking. In the case of questions worth a greater number of marks Centres should remind candidates that this serves as an indicator of the level of detail, explanation, development and reasoning required by the examiners as well a guide of how long should be spent in providing an answer.

### Section B

#### Question 2

This was the most popular question in this section of the examination. It proved helpful to candidates to have four actions to choose from as it avoided the ‘blind alley’ sometimes produced by a poor independent choice of scenario to analyse. There were some very good answers to this essay which were able to argue rights and wrongs of a number of examples relevant to the headings chosen. These answers defined ‘moral code’ and were able to recognise that it is a subjective view involving the defining factors of an individual’s moral compass. The best essays were able to refer to specific moral codes – such as utilitarianism and religious faiths – to inform their answers. Weaker answers tended not to refer to specifics within their chosen headings and often neglected to provide any definition or comment on moral code outside the two choices made.

Some candidates sensibly defined and discussed the moral code at the beginning of their essays. This placed their answers in a context and provided a focus for their observations. However, there were some exceptional answers to this question with clear development of the moral code, evidence of reference to wider knowledge and well developed analysis of supporting actions.

### Question 3

The question invited candidates to use personal experience to generate a reasoned response. Some accounts described in detail the deaths of those close to them or the break-up of their family or a personal relationship. There were also accounts of sexuality and of experiences of being bullied in childhood. For a small number of students the question opened a space for an uncomfortably honest exploration of misfortunes. Often, however, the writer did not have the skill to do justice to the experience, especially in the time available.

General moral improvement or a more positive outlook on life tended to be the 'impact', without alluding to any particular actions that need to be taken. For example, in relation to a friend who had taken drugs or a friend who had become pregnant, the conclusion was often something along the lines of 'this showed me how not to...' or something similar.

### Question 4

Candidates were offered the opportunity to discuss two of the art forms referred to in the specification. Whilst some attempted to display knowledge of art by citing examples, few had any real understanding of *purpose* in art. There was indication that some students thought the question required purely philosophical analysis of the *purposes* of art and the effort required drove specific experiences out of their minds. Indeed, some candidates managed to complete the exercise without mentioning a single name of an artist or work of art. Where names were mentioned, there was little indication that the student was familiar with the artist's work. Most enthusiasm was directed towards the *business* of art: branding, image-differentiation, merchandising, selling. There was little or no reference to critical or cultural theories.

## Section C

### Question 5

- a) There were some very good answers from candidates who had looked at the sources carefully and who were aware of some basic developments in medicine and hygiene. Issues such as privacy and comfort (some referring to recent legislation), improved lighting and better hygiene and the prevention of the spread of infection were commonly cited. Unfortunately a number of candidates did not make effective comparisons, usually caused by not looking carefully enough at the sources. Surprisingly, none referred to recent concerns that standards of hygiene might have slipped. The weaker, more generalised answers used "improvements in technology" as a catch-all explanation.
- b) Most candidates coped successfully with this question. Home advantages of comfort, ease of visiting, familiar surroundings, and proximity of family were identified. Disadvantages included the lack of specialist equipment and nursing, the time that would be taken in contacting emergency services, and the burden placed upon home carers. Unfortunately some candidates misread the question and compared care at a care home with that in a hospital.
- c) This question gave opportunities for candidates to provide interesting contrasts and sound reasoning for their ideas. Many were surprisingly well informed, particularly about the facilities( or lack of them) for elderly people in rural areas. Many made the point that James, who would need little in the way of health care, had access to far more than Mary, who was in far greater need. There were some assumptions about made about James, that he may need access to a counsellor as his job is stressful, while Mary was sometimes 'put in a care home' simply because, at 82, 'she would not be able to look after herself'. Arthritis was sometimes assumed to lead inevitably to a sufferer being bed-ridden.

Differences in entitlement and prioritisation for treatment were well aired. The best answers offered sustained development and comparison, finishing with the insight that, in the case of these two, the person more in need of healthcare facilities was the more poorly placed to access them. There were a few cases of alarming misconceptions relating to patient care and availability of treatment on the NHS.

## Section D

### Question 6

This proved to be an unpopular question, which perhaps highlights candidates' lack of knowledge of and interest in political matters. The requirements of the examination are clearly set out in the specification. Those candidates who did answer here were sometimes very knowledgeable about the UK political system in general but not always so well placed to apply this to this particular issue. Perhaps in light of last year's referendum on PR, there seemed to be some who had confused the two proposals. The key point of more equal representation, by making the numbers of voters per MP more even, was largely ignored.

What characterised most essays was generalised argument without any clear context. Many of the positives and negatives offered by candidates were not necessarily accurate, nor would they have depended on the particular boundary changes proposed. Thus, examples were really important to achieving success with this question. The main advantage cited was that of cost-saving. Some thought there was merit in having roughly the same number of representatives at national level as other European countries, but did not explain why.

### Question 7

This question offered further confirmation of the fact that candidates have insufficient knowledge and experience of *Political Processes and Goals*. Answers almost always focused simply on why a group of people was preferable to a single person. Little indication was given of the kind of issues the group might be tackling and very few candidates wrote anything about a Councillor's role and whether this was a better option. Some candidates did gain credit for recognising that a group would be able to offer knowledge on a variety of topics and would be able to represent more sectors of society.

Some also claimed that a group might disagree more amongst themselves but these candidates did not appreciate that a Councillor does not act in isolation. Many students confused local government with national representation and there were references to MPs and the Houses of Parliament. Again most of the debate was conducted through generalisations, although it was clear that some of the dynamics of consultation and decision making were understood.

### Question 8

This was by far the most popular choice from this section of the paper. The main weaknesses in candidates' responses were putting forward totally unrealistic solutions with no justification or evaluation of them. A common issue was that candidates identified only one problem (usually too much traffic) and applied it to both the individual and the business. This might have been successful if they had looked at a business problem that was different from the issue of the individual staff member getting to work.

Individual problems were understood better than the problems facing businesses. Sometimes the individual and the business were treated as if there were no separation between the two. A few candidates wrote extensively about their experience with travel to college, and did not seem to notice that this was not strictly within the confines of the question. For example it is unlikely that either a business or an individual member of staff would agree to providing/living in special dormitories near the workplace. There was little understanding of the organisation or the economics of public transport and too many simply advocated the building of wider roads or that the government should provide 'more trains'.

There were some more thoughtful suggestions involving staggered working hours and car-sharing schemes, but those who simply stated solutions – such as, everyone should walk to work; fine employees who arrive late; make them serve a 'detention' and leave later; close the premises early and make them wait outside before leaving for home; fire them and employ workers who live closer to the shop – received little credit. A few attempted to use the news concerning a proposed High Speed train from Birmingham to London to suggest that long distance commuting might become reality for larger numbers of workers. Generally, it was rare to find a student who could draw connections between specific problems affecting local people with a bigger economic or political issue or theory.

## F732 The Scientific Domain

### General Comments

The overall performance of candidates was very good and it was pleasing to note in most responses a sustained effort to present clearly focused points.

In this session there was evidence in Section A that some candidates had not prepared themselves fully for the mathematical and scientific knowledge that the specification for this unit contains. However, there were indications of good preparation for Section B, with most essays well-organised and containing some balanced argument. Candidates should be reminded that the careful reading of questions is of great importance as, at times, key issues were omitted. This was noted in Questions 3 and 5 where some candidates did not refer to the crux of the question. For example, in Question 3 there was often a lack of comment regarding the local people and in Question 5, there was not always a personal choice of a scientific issue chosen.

In the Scientific Domain, candidates are expected to have use of a calculator in the examination – and so they should be familiar with using it. However, it was evident that mathematical skills in performing calculations were not strong. As highlighted in June 2011, it is very important for candidates to practise these skills in the course of their studies; this should be seen as an extension of their Mathematics GCSE courses. For example, Question 2(a) required the substitution of numbers into formulae, and the transposition of variables to find the height of water in the cylinder. Marks awarded in Section A would be enhanced if there was continuing practice of mathematical issues during preparation for the examination.

Very few rubric errors were reported and candidates' time management was good, though there were some lengthy answers to Question 1 which might have impacted on the time left available to complete the rest of the examination. The mark allocations should help to define the length of response expected and Centres should continue to stress this point.

In Section B, the essay provides a platform for the presentation of ideas supported by evidence and by candidates' own personal opinions and experience. A well planned response which unlocks mark awarded under Assessment Objective 3 (personal experience and examples), and which is focused on the question, will enable a candidate to gain higher marks.

The quality of written communication was encouraging. This was highlighted by a good use of vocabulary and accurate spelling. Candidates need reminding that Assessment Objective 4 (communication) is assessed in each part of the examination paper, not just in the essay.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### Section A

##### Question 1

A scientific understanding of the movement of the ball on different inclined planes was central to this question.

- (a) There were some correct answers to this part of the question, where candidates indicated that it was graph D and explained this in terms of the velocity of the ball and the time taken. However, in many answers, graph A was chosen and this was then explained by reference to the graph as if it was a distance/time graph not a velocity/time graph. When the incorrect graph had been chosen, some candidates were still able to explain the

movement of the ball very accurately, so some credit was awarded. A small but worrying minority wrote **only** the letter A, B, C or D as their answer. Questions need to be read fully and careful account needs to be taken of the mark allocation, which serves as an indicator of the level of detail and engagement that is required in a good answer.

- (b)(i) Most candidates were able to explain the movement of the ball in the different and circumstances. There were some good answers that included reference to increasing and/or decreasing velocity, a comparison of the distance covered and the time taken.
- (ii) However, some answers were over-long and were characterised by descriptions that were hampered by a lack of clarity and clear scientific knowledge.

Some candidates used the word 'quicker' to indicate a higher velocity, for example in part (ii) when the ball was kicked harder. In other responses the word 'quicker' was used to indicate a shorter time span, for example in part (i) where the ball reached its maximum distance up the steeper slope in less time. Such breakdown in clarity resulted in communication marks not being awarded. Written responses were preferred to provision of a graph by candidates; where graphs were presented they were often not labelled correctly and did not show the differences required by the questions.

- (c) Good responses showed a clear understanding of the use of an inclined plane. Examples cited included disabled ramps, skateboarding ramps, conveyor belts in factories, drag lifts for skiers and loading ramps. Some candidates gave examples of driving up roads on hills or mountains but did not provide enough detail. There were very few scientific explanations of the comparison of the work/force involved in using a ramp and lifting an object vertically. This required careful consideration of the stem of the question and it would have been helpful if it had been used in conjunction with the example given.
- (d) Most candidates were able to offer an example of an inclined plane which allowed free movement downhill, for example a children's slide, big dipper, water draining off a sloping roof and a downhill skier. Not all of these examples explained that gravity was involved. In weaker responses the word 'freely' (from the question) was repeated in the explanation of the example chosen, thus indicating a lack of understanding of the downhill movement.

## Question 2

This question involved substitution into formulae and the differences in uniform and non-uniform shapes. Most candidates supported their answer with some form of working. This allowed awarding of credit for parts of the calculation even when the final answer was incorrect.

- (a) There were some very carefully organised answers in terms of working out for this part of the question. It was evident, in the cases of more able candidates, that there was a good understanding of the substitution involved. This included calculations for the volumes of the sphere and the cylinder being set out clearly, followed by mathematical statements that the volumes were equal. Even if it was not possible for full marks to be awarded in this part of the question, clarity of the supporting working out allowed examiners to award some marks for attempts at calculations.

Candidates should be reminded of the importance of accuracy, as in some calculations seen,  $\frac{4}{3}$  was rounded to 1.3 giving an answer for the volume of the sphere of 110.214 (using  $\pi = 3.14$ ). This then incurred more inaccuracy in the calculation of the height of the water in the cylinder, as it produced an answer of 8.775 cm.

Some common algebraic errors were as follows:

- $3^3$  was interpreted as  $3 \times 3 = 9$
- $\frac{4}{3}$  was omitted from the calculation

- the contents of the bracket were calculated, then cubed, giving  $(\frac{4}{3} \times 3.14 \times 3)^3 = 12.56^3 = 1981.39$
  - when volumes were equated this was not always followed by the correct manipulation of the formula to find the height. The most common error was to subtract/add instead of divide.
- (b) A few correct answers showed that candidates had understood the difference in the uniform cross section of the cylinder and the non-uniform cross section of the sphere. Answers which merely stated that they were 'different shapes' were not insufficiently explicit. Some answers did not refer to the lack of height in the formula for the sphere without elaboration or explain how this was more complex. Some candidates used part of the wording in the question and said it was more complex because it 'partly filled the sphere'.

## Section B

### Question 3

This question required recognition of the use of conservation projects together with the advantages and disadvantages to the local community of such projects taking place. If a context was included it became easier to support the advantages and disadvantages offered. Eco-tourism, the exchange of ideas from different perspectives and cultures, medical care, and economic benefits to local people were cited as popular advantages. In the cases where helping the community to build a school or digging wells were proposed, they were developed to include the advantage of helping the education of the local community. Good responses also included the experience of new skills being introduced into the local community, the use of different farming methods, and the possibility of a greater understanding of sustainability.

Disadvantages included the pollution caused by transporting people and machinery and the effect that this might have on the community as well as the local environment. Intrusion into the lives of remoter communities and the fact that the project would only be available for a particular time period were also popular choices.

Weaker candidates failed to understand 'Eco-Tourism' and simply described general benefits of bringing tourism to an area, thus omitting the focus of the question on 'local people'. At times, this then became a more cultural and social response despite the clear environmental prompts given in the question.

A few candidates used examples of UK conservation projects in the Lake District and, while these could be appropriate, the use of this particular example often made advantages and disadvantages offered more challenging to develop. Several issues raised here – such as new skills acquired, investment in infrastructure, sustainable farming or the access to a different culture – were not developed in as much depth as might have been the case if the response had been set in the context of, for example, India or Africa.

### Question 4

Generally two ideas from the list were identified, with the most popular being advertising for donors in less developed countries and the use of animal organs being seen as the least appropriate. When discussing advertising in less economically developed countries candidates suggested that general healthcare (and that of the organ) in that country might be a problem and the transport of organs might not be efficient. When this idea was selected some well thought out responses emerged which referred to both scientific and health issues.

Overall, the most appropriate incentives were considered to be cash payments to card holders and jumping the NHS queue, although some candidates thought that the patients would only be jumping the queue for transplants for themselves.

Some very good responses were seen where candidates displayed clear scientific knowledge, especially in terms of recent advances in stem cell research to grow human tissue or genetic engineering in the transfer of human genes to animals (so that animal organs could be used without rejection.) Where the development of alternative treatments was chosen the points offered were often weaker as there was a lack of examples to justify this position.

It was popularly felt that animal rights were more important than human lives and there was very little comment on genetic differences and the associated problems. Comments on moral issues were frequent, but sometimes too much emphasis was placed on this issue.

Also, in some responses, the candidate's justification of the least appropriate idea was better developed than for the most appropriate idea. This resulted in an imbalanced answer that clearly impacted on the level of marks awarded.

### **Question 5**

This question offered an opportunity for candidates to explore an important scientific issue of their choice.

Examples of good suggestions were cures for cancer or HIV/Aids, pollution, smoking, overpopulation, world poverty and food supplies for the future. The diminishing of fossil fuels compared to global warming provided a good balanced argument. Overpopulation or increasing birth rates were used as instances of higher priority over increased life expectancy. Obesity and Global Warming were the most favoured choices from the list. These discussions were often well organised and showed understanding of scientific issues.

However, because some candidates had not read the question thoroughly they had not identified their own personal choice of issue. In these cases sometimes two or three issues were chosen from the list and the candidate then tried to assess priorities between them all. Very weak responses simply included a prepared essay on Global Warming or increased life expectancy.

# **F733 Domain Exploration: Applying Synoptic Skills**

## **General Comments**

It is gratifying to be able to report that most Centres and candidates are positively responding to the format of the paper. Past reports to Centres have drawn attention to the problems of time management caused by the writing of very long answers to questions in Section A. The fifty marks available for this Section indicate that this is exactly half of the examination paper; it follows that approximately half of the time should be spent in completing the four compulsory questions.

In this series, a positive improvement was noted, in that answers to Section A developed ideas whilst remaining focused on the topic. At the same time, sufficient time was allowed to deal effectively with the essay in Section B; short and superficial essays were rarely presented. Candidates engaged with the paper and its subject matter, showing considerable appreciation of synoptic writing as well as displaying well-practised skills in Section A.

Whilst it is clear that the achievement of candidates reflects committed and well-planned teaching in many Centres, it is of some concern that the breadth of knowledge available to candidates is so narrow in respect of the Arts. In Question 4, for example, very few candidates referred to literature other than Shakespeare (cited in the source), or to painting or the stage; none at all referred to music, film or architecture. The effects of specialisation in education, and an apparent lack of background in the Arts were factors that regularly surfaced in answers to this question.

Punctuation and handwriting are still causes for concern. Centres are asked to remind their candidates that clear communication is an assessed element of the examination and that examiners take very seriously the issue of poor spelling, punctuation and grammar. In the cases of candidates whose handwriting is consistently poor or illegible it is important that Centres take advantage of the concessions available to ensure that a script is available in a form that can be easily read and assessed. Centres need to bear in mind that the presentation of candidates' work forms an integral part of its overall quality when examiners consider the submission for a fair assessment.

## **Comments on Individual Questions**

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

The majority of candidates handled this question well. 'Saintly' qualities were identified as vision, foresight, courage and dedication. 'Communist' traits included insistence on equality of sacrifice, the denial of privilege to the rich and powerful and the highlighting of the laziness and selfishness of those willing to acknowledge the need for action but unwilling to reduce their carbon footprint in order to further it. High marks were awarded for answers that embodied the detail or essence of these points. Some candidates ignored the George Monbiot quotation and evaluated the reality of anthropogenic climate change. Answers based on this misreading could not be credited.

## Question 2

Most candidates focused quite ably on an ethical issue. Popular choices included family loyalty versus the morality of theft, Paul's basis for taking revenge on his employers for sacking him, and the morality of his knowingly endangering Sam's liberty and career. Differentiation was most clearly revealed through the ability to argue an ethical case based on a chosen issue which was also securely based on a multi-layered source.

## Question 3

Confining an answer to data response alone meant that a maximum of four marks could be awarded. Secure, well-argued, qualitative development was needed to access higher marks. At the same time it was disappointing to read many scripts which stated that more females professed religious belief than males, attributing this to the emotional instability of women as well as to the numinous experience of giving birth. A surprising number of candidates also interpreted the data as meaning that religious belief in the UK was in terminal decline, ignoring the fact that it is clear that many people still profess their devotion in some way.

## Question 4

This question proved to be an excellent discriminator. Weaker candidates struggled to rise above statements of the obvious. Average responses managed to make more or less secure points about specialisation and the inherent differences between scientific and cultural thought. Better answers referred to the congruence of scientific and artistic processes and procedures and to the artificiality of boundaries between these. There were also some very good evaluations, for example: "whilst superficial knowledge of both domains would impress at a dinner party, the fact remains that the world is mostly enlightened by individuals who specialise in what they excel at."

## Section B

### Question 5

The discriminator in this question was ability to read the data at a level other than the superficial. A significant number of weaker answers opted for the facile 'post hoc propter hoc' reading of the data, and spoke (often indignantly) of the moral decline evidenced by, for example, the replacement of libraries with lap-dancing clubs. The best candidates picked up on the synoptic roots of the question and weighed different interpretations of the data within the domains using illustrations. A majority of answers involved a mixture of these two approaches largely prompted by the individual expertise of a candidate. The best answers understood that changes represented a substantial transition from public provision to private enterprise.

### Question 6

This proved to be the most popular choice in Section B, possibly because it offered candidates the opportunity to recycle their personal experience. It cannot be said too often that candidates cannot simply tell a story from their life in order to gain high marks.

It was possible to score a mark in the middle of Level 3 (24–27 out of 50) in this question by selective and judicious personal testimony enlivened with straightforward analysis. Reaching higher levels required a secure, broad knowledge base, where the best candidates assessed social theories and applied them to their findings. The question also attracted candidates who seemingly had not been carefully prepared or briefed on the demands of the examination. Responses appeared to be solely anecdotal, containing little evidence of synoptic understanding. That said, there were some very good answers to this question, particularly those citing events such as the London riots in summer 2011 and the Arab Spring as examples of the impact of media influence on ideologies and values.

**Question 7**

This was the least popular question, producing a wide range of answers. Good essays worked through the synoptic element of the question which invited them implicitly to assess the relative importance of technological, social and cultural factors involved in the recovery from a natural disaster by a more or less complex society. Less able candidates found little to say beyond what they had gleaned from watching television news broadcasts that covered natural disasters in Sri Lanka, New Orleans or Japan.

# F734 Culture, Science and Society: Making Connections

## General Comments

It was pleasing to note that the majority of candidates approached the examination in a positive and mature way. The source material was used to good effect in both answers, though weaker answers tended to rely too much on lifted ideas thereby failing to include additional material, experience or knowledge. Ideally sources should be used as a 'springboard' so that candidates may take the 'wider view' and consider matters from a local, national and international perspective. This approach will add strength and security to the essay as well as revealing a broad knowledge base with the potential to make connections. However, the focus should remain on the question posed and not on the analysis and relative reliability of the sources.

In this examination it is important to think about the synoptic links between the domains. A carefully considered plan is probably essential in order to write a balanced and inclusive response that will access the higher mark bands. To this end, time management is critical and it was encouraging to see that this facet of the examination is improving each session.

The consistent decline in use of the written word continues to cause concern. In addition to the ever prevalent homophonic errors (for example, there/they're/their, to/too), punctuation and paragraphing have also declined. Commas were often used instead of full stops, and a number of responses had no paragraphing at all. In addition, some essays employed a journalistic style, rather than an academic debate style of response. Good communication is an integral part of the assessment process and serves as an essential link between the thought processes of the candidate and the assessor. Centres need to remind candidates of the need to use language appropriate to the forum of an examination.

## Comments on Individual Questions

### Question 1

While the question was in two parts, it was tackled in a variety of ways. Some chose to consider all of the advantages and disadvantages of GM foods followed by 'extent', while others tackled each of the three domains separately. At best, essays accurately defined GM and gave examples of successful applications of GM crops. A good understanding of GM allowed for a complex and reasoned argument and an informed assessment and this was particularly clear in the case of candidates who presented clear case studies of GM crops in India with seed patented by Monsanto. It was also interesting to note a number of essays that gained strength from the candidates' agricultural background, providing an objective look at the issues and often relating these to the wider world.

When discussing the scientific and social domains, links were often made between advances in science and the ability to address pressing social issues such as increased population, famine and poverty. However, there was some confusion between GM and selective breeding and between organic and traditional farming methods. The problem was sometimes extended by the proposal that harmful chemicals are added in the genetically modified process, when in fact DNA is manipulated and inserted.

Source 2, the most abstract of the three, led many students to include a number of cultural references. While the question invites scientific and social comment there was a keen awareness of how GM might impact upon different cultures and regions of the world. A small

number of candidates were able to see the commercial advantages of square tomatoes in terms of transport, reduced damage and shelf stacking. In some weaker essays the cultural domain was regularly identified as 'playing god', 'unnatural or 'offensive to some religions' without any development of what this might mean in terms of religious tenets or to those with restrictive diets.

Given the brevity of the sources it was heartening to read so many essays which showed reliable and detailed knowledge, particularly of how GM might benefit the less economically developed areas of the world. Highlighting the fact that a preoccupation with "Organic" is all very well for the affluent middle classes lent a degree of gravitas and ironic humour to what was usually a well-constructed response.

## **Question 2**

This question provoked a wide range ideas, sometimes outspoken and controversial to the extent that strength of opinion proved overwhelming and prevented the construction of a considered, balanced response. On the whole, the notion of what it means to be British was presented as healthy and inclusive.

Many essays offered interesting and wide ranging examples in support, coupled with relevant personal experience to illustrate arguments. Such examples included memories of the Golden Jubilee celebrations, the emotion of watching the Royal Wedding in 2011, the anticipation of approaching Olympic Games, and in some instances being an unwitting participant the London riots of 2011. Some answers were optimistic, focusing on the positive aspects of contemporary Britain, but at the same time offered a compelling counter-argument. Examples of these included littering and recycling schemes, renewable energy production, and discussion of the government's proposals for changing the country that involve cuts to services.

The science domain proved to be challenging but some of the greatest British scientists featured as a source of illustration. Professor Brian Cox was often cited, as well as Stephen Hawking. Some unsubstantiated comments revealed the conflicting source opinions relating to scientific issues, whereas there were some developments of this idea of contradiction as a result of the poor state of media journalism: an interesting and relevant connection.

The cultural domain proved to be the strongest source of inspiration. It offered the opportunity to reflect upon Britain's heritage, its countryside, and its wealth of talent in literature and the Arts. In the year which celebrates the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dickens' birth it was with sadness that examiners noted how few candidates mentioned authors and playwrights other than Shakespeare. Examples from music and cinema were more commonly used.

In weaker responses the source material was used extensively without including any original ideas. However, the majority of essays presented well-informed ideas and attitudes that were invariably decent.

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