



General Certificate of Education

General Studies 5761

Specification A

GA3W Society, Politics and the Economy (Written)

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - June series

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GA3W Society, Politics and the Economy (Written)

General points

This summer's paper discriminated very effectively and able, well-prepared students were able to respond extremely well to its challenge. Most students are now familiar with the structure of the paper and the skills they need to develop to tackle it successfully. Many are now aware that a very short answer might be enough to secure full marks on Question 1 and more candidates are leaving sufficient time to answer Question 5 which carries 15 marks. Question 3 is always about source evaluation although this year candidates were asked to identify only the source's strengths. There were very few instances of questions remaining unattempted and examiners reported a particularly good response to Question 2 on the advantages and disadvantages of part-time employment for students.

Specific questions

Question 1

- This is the only question on the paper that confines itself to material contained solely within the source and only a very small number of candidates are unable to resist the temptation to bring in their own knowledge. Unfortunately, even if relevant, this cannot be credited and is another example of how time can be lost at an early stage.
- Candidates are asked only to *identify* 5 points. Lengthy explanations are not required to answer this 5 mark question.
- Levels of comprehension were good and there was a widespread ability to identify most, if not all, the factors that might be used to tackle the National Health Service's potential deficit. Where marks were lost it was usually because more than one reference was made to the need to raise productivity or to examples of cost cutting.

Question 2

- The issue of part-time work for students clearly struck a chord and there were many good answers.
- Most candidates offered well-balanced and well-informed discussion and only a few changed the focus of the question to direct criticisms against government policy towards student funding.
- While the dangers to academic performance of excessive part-time employment were routinely pointed out, most argued that it was necessary to meet basic needs, to reduce debts and to provide a range of potential skills.
- Ideas from the source were well-used and most candidates were able to utilise some of their own knowledge and experience of part-time work.
- Some responses were very lengthy and sometimes this compromised the ability of candidates to tackle Question 5 effectively.

Question 3

- It is clear that some candidates are very well prepared for a source evaluation question. They understand things like the presence of bias, the difference between fact and opinion, the use of quantitative evidence, the provenance of the source, linguistic devices and the importance of providing examples.

- Some students were less well prepared and tended to rely on often lengthy and descriptive source summaries or equally lengthy comments on energy policy. Such answers did not achieve marks higher than the Level 1 band.
- A minority, who had often done quite a good answer on source strengths were unable to resist the temptation to write about weaknesses even though these were not asked for in this particular question and, consequently gained no marks for that section.

Question 4

- The best answers usually came from candidates who used the structure of the question to produce a coherent exploration of moral, political and economic aspects of attempts to reduce the level of poppy growing in Afghanistan.
- A few of these respondents displayed quite sophisticated knowledge of political tensions and the links between opium production, global drug trafficking and terrorism.
- Usually moral (using daughters to settle debts) and economic (the huge contribution of poppy growing and opium production to the Afghan economy) issues were dealt with more effectively than political matters.
- Weaker answers tended to concentrate on the source too much, often repeating large sections without personal interpretation or explanation e.g. stating that drug taking was 'against their religion' without indicating any secure knowledge of 'them' or the Islamic faith.

Question 5

- Not all candidates left sufficient time to tackle this question – one which carries the highest number of marks on the paper.
- Usually borrowing heavily from sources, most answers focused more on aspects of what might be 'possible' in terms of ways of controlling costs in the NHS or Royal Mail rather than what might be 'desirable' in terms of consumer response or adverse voter reaction to potential cuts in services.
- Too often ways of controlling costs were mentioned but not analysed. It was widely believed that privatisation would work wonders despite the debts of the two organisations concerned and the ability of health service users to pay for their care directly. Often these 'solutions' were over-simplified.
- Alternatively, it was claimed that increased budgets would somehow automatically have a 'magic wand' effect on cost controls despite the significant subsidies already given to Royal Mail and huge increases in NHS budgets. The likely reactions of tax payers (and voters) responsible for contributing to this spending were usually ignored.
- The highest marks went to those who treated the NHS and Royal Mail as separate and distinct organisations and who were able to see the difficulties of combining high quality services with low cost particularly for those living in rural areas, or who examined the huge and different demands made on the National Health Service.
- In coming to a conclusion on this question, one candidate summed things up very well when he wrote: "If there was a simple answer someone would have found it by now." In Society, Politics and the Economy, there are never simple answers to complex, and often controversial, questions.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.