



General Certificate of Education

General Studies 6761 *Specification A*

GSA6 Society, Politics and the Economy

Report on the Examination *2007 examination - January series*

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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General points

In some cases, it seemed that very little preparation had been done for the Case Study questions. Without this, chances of any sort of success are extremely low. Those who had prepared, and were able to blend information from the extracts with their own knowledge, were able to produce at least Level 2 answers to Questions 1–4 although relatively few had the analytical skills and consistency of approach to reach Level 3 across a range of questions. Data interpretation in Question 1 continues to present problems to many candidates, although it was pleasing to see how many made a genuine effort, even though levels of success varied, to deal with the philosophical issues surrounding the concepts of multiculturalism and ‘Britishness’ which formed the basis of Question 3.

On the whole, performance in the essay questions was broadly satisfactory, perhaps because many candidates were reasonably well-informed about issues surrounding international terrorism. The subject is frequently in the news and those who answered Question 8, and who maintained the focus on the question of problems associated with terrorism and the difficulties in tackling it successfully, often did well. Those who produced more general narratives were unable to capitalise fully on what they knew, but some candidates were particularly knowledgeable and used a commendably wide range of supporting examples. Answers to the other three essay questions were variable. A few were well informed about low pay, discrimination in society or the role of the political news media but most based their answers on rather limited knowledge.

Section A: Case Study

Question 1

Extract A incorporated four figures which were clearly linked. However, many answers took each figure separately and made mainly descriptive comments, some of which were extremely vague and generalised. Others concentrated excessively on the presentation of the data and issues of methodology, ignoring content almost totally.

Preparation for this type of question is essential and few were able to spot trends, say in unemployment rates by gender among different ethnic groups, the significance of the composition, size and distribution of ethnic groups and their concentration in the capital, and the rise in immigrants over emigrants since 1997.

Too many tried to argue that statistics usually lie and that they are manipulated for political advantage, missing the point that the problem with data is often how people choose to interpret them. The data used were taken from the last census and the Office for National Statistics, representing much more reliable sources than most.

More valid criticisms were the dated nature of the information, the exclusion of groups that fail to register for official purposes, the absence of figures for groups such as unemployment among Bangladeshi women, and generalities such as ‘north west’ or ‘south east’. Only a few drew attention to the limitations of non-qualitative data which lack any explanations for trends that might seem to emerge.

Question 2

The tendency in answering this question was to rush towards a conclusion that Extract B proved that racism in sport was commonplace, usually citing the examples from international football or the lack of black managers and season ticket holders. More sophisticated answers used such evidence but counter-balanced this with other comments made by the author about attempts to tackle racism and the extent to which this had achieved some success.

Despite references to the alleged refusal of a white South African rugby international to share a room with a black team-mate, American baseball, the Williams sisters in tennis and Tiger Woods, the evidence that racism was 'commonplace' (rather than, say, 'evident on occasions') was hardly compelling and few suggested that, although racism might play its part (say in the case of former Bury manager Andy Preece) it might not be the only explanation for the lack of black people in positions of responsibility, particularly when so many black players have enjoyed considerable success in the Premier League.

Question 3

Extract C, written by Sarfraz Manzoor, the British-born son of Pakistani immigrants, clearly captured the interest of many candidates and recent allegations of bullying and racist behaviour in the TV programme *Big Brother* were frequently, and appropriately, cited. Very few, though, had tried to seek further information on the exact nature of the Tebbit test. (Who would Sarfraz Manzoor or his parents support if England played Pakistan in a cricket test match?)

Cricket, though, was sometimes cited as an example of Britishness in an era of an almost exclusively British-born, white society sipping cups of tea or warm beer in an atmosphere of unchanging and ordered calm where most people knew their place and didn't question it. If they ever existed, such days are long gone and now things seem much more complex. Generally, there was widespread support for a more tolerant approach to defining 'Britishness'.

'Multiculturalism' is probably an even more difficult concept to define satisfactorily and the Prime Minister's difficulties in this direction were frequently quoted. In many respects, multiculturalism was an ideal – the bringing together of different beliefs, values and cultures – which most candidates continued to support in terms of the extent that it enriched and reflected a much more diverse society. The reality, though, was often different. Segregation, or monoculturalism, is more likely than diversification and many British Muslims have been unjustifiably vilified since recent terrorist outrages. If ever a question suggested that there are no easy answers to complex problems, this was it.

Question 4

Answers to this question, where time is usually pressing, were a bit longer and sometimes slightly better than usual. Most were able to offer some contrasts between Extract D (generally praising the UK for being one of the few EU countries to develop a system of recording racially-based crimes and taking the subject seriously) and the more mixed messages of Extract E (some improvements since the Macpherson report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence but a rise in racist incidents reported to the police, particularly in rural areas, and wider concerns expressed by the Chairman for the Commission for Racial Equality).

More probing responses argued that it was difficult to form clear conclusions on the grounds that there were no directly comparable figures from European countries and that better methods for recording race-based crime didn't necessarily mean that it was being tackled more effectively in the UK.

Section B: Essays

Question 5

Although some candidates concentrated on single areas such as gender or racial discrimination, most answers to this question tried to embrace the four groups referred to in the question but usually did so in a generalised manner. Few candidates had any knowledge, detailed or otherwise, of legislation designed to reduce discrimination on grounds of race or gender although most had a vague awareness that, in more recent years, changes in the law had sought to protect the interests of the disabled and of people, young or old, who might be discriminated against because of their age.

Mostly, candidates judged that the situation had improved but that 'more needed to be done' particularly to equalise pay and to offer more safeguards against racial discrimination. Very few specific remedial measures were identified and only the best answers provided some discussion of the time-scale that might be involved in changing attitudes to certain groups or the extent to which there was still a need to make people more aware of prejudice and potentially discriminatory actions.

Question 6

Most answers suffered because of an inability to be specific about the media and its constituent parts. Consequently the often generalised material covering how 'the media' inform or the extent to which 'the media' was biased and reported news in a distorted and sensationalised way simply did not differentiate sufficiently.

Newspapers, though they do seek to inform, often tend to have political leanings and some candidates were able to offer clear supporting examples. Despite the accusations of the different political parties, bias in television news reports is far less likely than some candidates alleged – indeed there is often statutory provision to prevent this.

A handful of candidates rightly suggested that the internet was becoming increasingly important as a news provider, pointing to the rise of blogging and its increased use by many political journalists. With limited control of such sites the possibilities for both informing and distorting are seemingly endless.

Question 7

This was not a popular question but those who answered it were often well-informed about why certain groups in society were badly paid and the extent to which the lack of money turned lives into an existence characterised by poverty, debt and frequently crime.

While opportunities for social mobility still exist it was widely recognised that those who lacked educational qualifications might soon be locked into a cycle of deprivation. Unskilled, and often temporary, work did not pay well, nor did predominantly female part-time work or, in many cases, jobs undertaken by migrant workers from the EU.

A few mentioned the decline of trade unions which might offer a measure of protection for their members and there were some telling accounts of the extent to which many people were marginalised in society. With few if any prospects, members of the underclass lacked aspirations and quickly sank into a trough of apathy and a dull sense of resignation that they were destined to be the losers in an increasingly acquisitive society.

Question 8

Shortage of knowledge was rarely an issue in the many answers to this question although not everyone directed what they knew to answering the question. Those who got lower marks often did so because much of what they wrote was in narrative form usually starting from the 9/11 attack on the USA, incorporating links, real or imagined, with Iraq and Afghanistan and grinding to a halt soon after the London bus and tube bombings. The problems involved were rarely made explicit and lack of international co-operation, or the intransigence of President Bush, were usually advanced to explain why global terrorism was so difficult to tackle. Consequently, too many candidates did not realise their potential because their knowledge was not directed to answering the question.

Some candidates were particularly well-informed, mentioning the IRA, Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, ETA in Spain and bitter battles between Israelis and Palestinians. Much was made of the psychology of terrorism, its cost to transport systems and the economy, the extent to which it provoked mistrust of minorities, Islamophobia and international discord. Many saw terrorists as 'the invisible enemy', skilfully utilising modern communications technology, operating in secret cells, unafraid of death and driven by a mixture of faith and ideology. It was a potent mix and underlined the sheer scale of the task faced by governments and counter-terrorist organisations across the world.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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