



## **Curriculum Description for London Examinations GCE 'A' Level**

### **GENERAL STUDIES (8206)**

#### **Aims**

Students who follow a course leading to AS or Advanced GCE in General Studies will be encouraged by this specification to:

- develop a greater awareness of human knowledge, understanding and behaviour
- integrate knowledge from a range of disciplines in order to develop a synoptic view of how they relate to one another and how each may contribute to the understanding of issues being studied
- appreciate that there are various ways of interpreting different types of information and assess the relative merit of evidence in order to understand such concepts as objectivity, neutrality and bias
- think critically, logically and constructively about significant problems, acquire an appreciation of the strengths and limitations of different approaches and demonstrate an ability to justify their own
- develop a critical awareness and understanding of perennial and contemporary issues and develop a greater awareness of their historical and contemporary contexts in order to enhance skills of evaluation
- communicate with coherence and clarity in an appropriate format and style.

#### **Knowledge, understanding and skills**

The AS and Advanced GCE specifications incorporate the following framework:

#### **Thinking and analytical skills**

Thinking and analytical skills are present in all units of the AS and Advanced GCE specifications.

Thinking and analytical skills will be assessed in two ways:

- a) Types of knowledge. Students will be required to identify and differentiate: scientific knowledge, knowledge based on moral values, knowledge based on belief, objective knowledge, subjective knowledge, truth and falsity.
- b) Types of argument. Students will be required to identify and evaluate different types of argument: deductive, inductive, arguments from analogy, arguments from authority, arguments from cause.

The assessment of analytical skills will require students to analyse and evaluate types of knowledge and argument especially in terms of whether: the argument is justified, is based on a fallacy, is subjective rather than objective, is implied rather than entailed, is true. Thinking and analytical skills will be assessed by requiring students to analyse passages on the subject content of each unit and to present their own arguments in answer to an essay question, based on the subject content of the specifications.

## **Knowledge and understanding**

Core knowledge and understanding is reflected in the study of issues identified between and within the following three overlapping areas:

### **Science, Mathematics and Technology**

- characteristics of the sciences (physical, life and earth)
- the nature of scientific objectivity and the question of progress
- understanding of scientific methods, principles, criteria and their application
- moral responsibility: the social, ethical and environmental implications of scientific discoveries and technological development
- mathematical reasoning and its application
- the relationship between technology, science, culture (past and/or present) and ideology

### **Culture, Morality, Arts and Humanities**

- beliefs, values and moral reasoning
- religious belief and experience, and connections between them
- understanding and appreciation of the nature and importance of culture
- creativity and innovation
- aesthetic evaluation
- media and communication

### **Society, Politics and the Economy**

- examination and appreciation of ideologies and values in society
- political processes and goals
- the nature of objectivity in social sciences; explanation and evaluation of human behaviour
- relationship between law, culture and ethics
- social and economic trends and constraints.

### **Rationale for the specification**

As a discipline, General Studies draws elements from English, history, geography, economics, politics, sociology and science, amongst other subjects. It is differentiated from traditional subjects by its focus on thinking and analytical skills and the requirement to examine questions from a broader standpoint than that of a single discipline.

General Studies now holds a key position in the curriculum given the increasing importance of students demonstrating breadth of knowledge, depth of knowledge, an ability to transfer skills and make connections, integrate ideas and develop concepts. Each of these areas is a feature of work in specifications for General Studies.

In supporting the development of an understanding of these challenges and choices, the specification can make a key contribution to enhancing the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of students, beyond the requirements of the National Curriculum. In addition, it supports the development of a range of key skills and research competencies that will be of value to students of all ages, studying and working in differing academic and vocational contexts.

### **Quality of written communication**

Students will be assessed for the quality of their written communication in each unit within the framework of the Communication assessment objective, according to the following criteria.

Students will be required to:

- select and use a form and style of writing which is appropriate to the purpose and to complex subject matter
- organise relevant material clearly and coherently using specialist vocabulary where appropriate
- ensure that writing is legible, with accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation, to make meaning clear.

### **Spiritual, moral, ethical, social and cultural aspects**

The specification provides students with opportunities to study the ways in which this subject can contribute to an understanding of spiritual, moral, ethical, social and cultural issues. For example, there are opportunities to consider moral and ethical issues such as genetic engineering in Unit 2 and abortion and euthanasia in Unit 4. The specification gives students the opportunity to examine questions from a broader standpoint than a single discipline.

### **European, health and environmental dimensions**

The specification provides students with the opportunity to gain an understanding of environmental education, the European dimension in education and health education in connection with the report 'Environmental Responsibility — An agenda for further and higher education' (HMSO, 1993) and the *Resolutions of the Councils of Ministers* (EC, 1988). For example, there is an opportunity to study the European Community in Units 3 or 5.

### **Key skills**

The specification will provide opportunities for developing and generating evidence for the key skills of:

- communication
- application of number
- information technology
- problem solving
- working with others
- improving own learning and performance.

The key skills of communication and application of number contribute to the assessment of the specification. There are many opportunities for teachers to assess key skills in the teaching of General Studies. For example:

- communication can be assessed in all units
- application of number can be assessed in Unit 3
- information technology can be assessed in coursework for Unit 3b
- improving own learning and performance can be tested in coursework for Unit 3b and Unit 4b
- working with others can be assessed in coursework for Unit 4b
- problem solving can be assessed in all units.

**Unit 1 (20%)****Aspects of culture — 1 hour 30 minutes**

Students answer questions based on the subject areas of culture, morality, arts and humanities. The paper will consist of three sections: Section A, Section B and Section C. Students must attempt all three sections. Section A will consist of short answer questions relating to the subject areas of the unit, Section B of short answer questions relating to given stimulus material, and Section C of three questions requiring extended writing which will relate to the subject areas of the unit. Students must answer **all** the questions in Sections A and B, and **one** question in Section C.

**Unit 2 (15%)****Scientific horizons — 1 hour 15 minutes**

Students answer questions based on the subject areas of science, mathematics and technology. The paper will consist of three sections: Section A, Section B and Section C. Students must attempt all three sections. Section A will consist of short answer questions relating to the subject areas of the unit, Section B of short answer questions relating to given stimulus material, and Section C of three questions requiring extended writing which will relate to the subject areas of the unit. Students must answer **all** the questions in Sections A and B, and **one** question in Section C.

**And either Unit 3(a) (15%)****Social perspectives — 1 hour 30 minutes**

Students answer questions based on the subject areas of society, politics and the economy. The paper will consist of three sections: Section A, Section B and Section C. Students must attempt all three sections. Section A will consist of short answer questions relating to the subject areas of the unit, Section B of short answer questions relating to given stimulus material, and Section C of three questions requiring extended writing which will relate to the subject areas of the unit.

Students must answer **all** the questions in Sections A and B, and **one** question in Section C. Some questions in this paper will involve the application of number and students might need a calculator and a ruler.

**or Unit 3(b) (15%)****Social perspectives coursework folder**

Students will be required to complete a coursework folder of approximately 1,500 words in length. The area of study for the folder must be drawn from **one** of the following specified themes:

- Race, Gender, Age or Disability
- Government and Politics: Britain and Europe
- Work, Leisure and Unemployment
- Crime, Deviance and the Legal System
- Family Life.

The coursework may consist of a single study of approximately 1,500 words or two related studies of approximately 750 words each. Students' topics must be selected from one of the above specified themes. Students may choose their own topic within their selected specified theme, provided they indicate which theme they have chosen. Students should select a topic which will allow them to pursue a subject of personal interest. The topic title may be chosen by the student or provided by the centre. In either case, it must be agreed with the teacher before planning and research begin. The selected topic must satisfy the subject content of the unit and be linked to one of the specified themes. The topic must allow the student to demonstrate evidence of ability in each of the assessment objectives.

Examples of the kinds of topics which would satisfy the assessment objectives for coursework are:

- Identify the needs of a particular social group (based on race, age, gender or disability). What different types of knowledge are used by sociologists in investigating the costs, nature and suitability of the provision made specifically to meet the needs of that group in a local facility (sporting, leisure, retail or public service)? How effective do you think their arguments are and what recommendations for improvement would you make?
- 'The proportion of single-parent families has increased in the last decade as a result of a rising divorce rate and changing social attitudes'. Investigate the social and economic consequences of this development.

The issue chosen for the topic should be sufficiently demanding to allow study in appropriate depth. The issue should also enable students to demonstrate their ability in application of number.

### **Textbooks and other resources**

The following are recommended:

- broadsheet daily or weekly newspapers and magazines
- internet and CD-Roms
- documentary television programmes.

There are a number of resource books available. Two that take a broad approach to ways in which this course can be covered are:

- Davies, G and Little, E — *General Studies* — (Longman, 2001) ISBN: 0-582-44761-5
- Watton, V/Hobson, D and Walton, D — *General Studies: an AS/A Level Course Text* — (Hodder & Stoughton, 2000) ISBN: 0-340-77539-4

Please refer to the SEAB website for more information regarding this course.  
<http://www.seab.gov.sg>