

GCE AS and A Level Subject Criteria for General Studies

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September 2011

Ofqual/11/4986

Contents

The criteria	3
Introduction	3
Aims and objectives	3
Subject content.....	3
Knowledge, understanding and skills.....	4
Assessment objectives	5
Scheme of assessment	6
Synoptic assessment.....	6
AS performance descriptions for general studies	7
A2 performance descriptions for general studies	9

The criteria

Introduction

AS and A level subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject.

They provide the framework within which the awarding organisation creates the detail of the specification.

Aims and objectives

1. AS and A level specifications in general studies should encourage learners to:
 - view issues from a wider range of perspectives than those offered by subject specialisms;
 - integrate knowledge from a range of disciplines in order to:
 - develop an understanding of the interrelationship between them;
 - encourage a broader and deeper understanding of issues;
 - think logically and creatively in order to:
 - assess the relative merits of evidence;
 - make informed judgements;
 - reach justifiable conclusions.

Subject content

2. There must be no prior knowledge requirements for AS and A level specifications in general studies.
3. AS and A level specifications in general studies must provide opportunities for learners to demonstrate breadth and depth of knowledge and an ability to transfer skills and make connections; integrate ideas and develop concepts; use arguments; make judgements; evaluate evidence; examine questions from a broader standpoint than that of a single discipline.

Knowledge, understanding and skills

4. Thinking and analytical skills must permeate AS and A level specifications. These skills will be assessed by testing learners' ability to draw distinctions between knowledge, truth and belief, and to recognise common fallacies, deductive and inductive arguments and arguments drawn from analogy, cause and authority.
5. The core knowledge and understanding must be reflected in the study of issues identified between, and within, the following three overlapping domains: the scientific, the cultural and the social. These three domains must be represented, in a broadly balanced way, within both AS and A level specifications.
6. All specifications must cover the following:
 - 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;
 - social, ethical and environmental implications and consequences of scientific discoveries and technological developments;
 - the moral responsibility of scientists;
 - mathematical reasoning and its application;
 - the relationship between technology, science, society (past and/or present) and ideology;
 - beliefs, values and moral reasoning;
 - religious belief and experience, and connections between them;
 - an understanding and appreciation of the changing nature and importance of culture creativity and innovation;
 - aesthetic evaluation;
 - media and communication;
 - 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;
 - the relationship between law, society and ethics;
 - social and economic trends and constraints.
7. However, not all of the skills and subject content will necessarily be assessed in any one examination series.
8. A level will differ from AS by the requirement to present greater challenge through the nature and depth of content studied; the wide range of links and connections that can be made; the greater variety of contexts and issues encountered; the complexity of the concepts dealt with. A level will extend beyond the AS, therefore, in terms of breadth, depth and higher-level skills as reflected in the assessment objectives.

Assessment objectives

9. The assessment objectives for AS and A levels are the same.
10. All learners must be required to meet the following assessment objectives. The assessment objectives are to be weighted in all specifications as indicated.

Assessment objectives		Weighting %		
		AS level	A2 level	A level
AO1	Demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding applied to a range of issues, using skills from different disciplines	30–40%	20–30%	25–35%
AO2	Marshal evidence and draw conclusions: select, interpret, evaluate and integrate information, data, concepts and opinions	30–40%	30–40%	30–40%
AO3	Demonstrate understanding of different types of knowledge, appreciating their strengths and limitations	10–15%	20–25%	15–20%

AO4	Communicate clearly and accurately in a concise, logical and relevant way	15–20%	15–20%	15–20%
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Scheme of assessment

11. Assessment must be entirely through external assessment.

Synoptic assessment

12. All specifications must include synoptic assessment at A2. Synoptic assessment relates to all assessment objectives. The definition of synoptic assessment in the context of general studies is as follows:

- AS and A level specifications in general studies must encourage learners to integrate knowledge from a range of disciplines in order to develop an understanding of the interrelationships between them, and to examine issues from a broader standpoint than that of a single discipline. Learners must be encouraged to think logically and creatively in order to assess the relative merits of evidence, make informed judgements and reach justified conclusions. They should communicate clearly and accurately in a concise and relevant way.
- Examples of ways in which synoptic assessment might be conducted include essay questions requiring learners to draw together knowledge, understanding and skills acquired and developed throughout the course and demonstrate transfer of skills.

AS performance descriptions for general studies

	Assessment objective 1	Assessment objective 2	Assessment objective 3	Assessment objective 4
Assessment objectives	Demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding applied to a range of issues, using skills from different disciplines.	Marshal evidence and draw conclusions: select, interpret, evaluate and integrate information, data, concepts and opinions.	Demonstrate understanding of different types of knowledge, appreciating their strengths and limitations.	Communicate clearly and accurately in a concise, logical and relevant way.
A/B boundary performance descriptions	Learners characteristically: a) demonstrate focused knowledge and understanding of a range of issues; b) use skills from different disciplines with confidence and consistency.	Learners characteristically: a) provide evidence of selecting, interpreting and applying relevant information, data, concepts and opinions; b) organise evidence to support arguments; c) draw reasoned conclusions.	Learners characteristically: a) identify different types of knowledge and make relevant evaluative comments.	Learners characteristically: a) communicate accurately, clearly and fluently, using appropriate language and structure.

<p>E/U boundary performance descriptions</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of issues; b) use skills from different disciplines with variable success. 	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) provide limited evidence of selecting and applying some relevant information, data and opinions; b) draw simple conclusions. 	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) recognise examples of different types of knowledge. 	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) convey meaning clearly despite limited powers of expression.
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A2 performance descriptions for general studies

	Assessment objective 1	Assessment objective 2	Assessment objective 3	Assessment objective 4
Assessment objectives	Demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding applied to a range of issues, using skills from different disciplines.	Marshal evidence and draw conclusions: select, interpret, evaluate and integrate information, data, concepts and opinions.	Demonstrate understanding of different types of knowledge, appreciating their strengths and limitations.	Communicate clearly and accurately in a concise, logical and relevant way.
A/B boundary performance descriptions	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) deploy knowledge and understanding across a wide range of issues;</p> <p>b) use skills from different disciplines with confidence and consistency.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) provide evidence of selecting, interpreting and applying relevant information, data, concepts and opinions;</p> <p>b) organise and evaluate evidence to support arguments;</p> <p>c) make connections and draw reasoned conclusions.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) identify correctly different types of knowledge;</p> <p>b) offer a sound evaluation of different types of knowledge.</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) communicate accurately, clearly, concisely, logically and fluently, using appropriate language and structure.</p>

<p>E/U boundary performance descriptions</p>	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) deploy some knowledge and understanding across issues; b) use skills from different disciplines with variable success. 	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) provide limited evidence of selecting and applying some relevant information, data and opinions; b) make limited connections and draw simple conclusions. 	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) identify examples of different types of knowledge; b) recognise some strengths and weaknesses of types of knowledge, but with limited success 	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) convey meaning clearly.
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First published by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation in 2011

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