



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



*Rewarding Learning*

# **GCE AS and A level subject criteria for general studies**

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 These subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all advanced subsidiary (AS) and advanced (A) level specifications in general studies. They provide the framework within which the awarding body creates the detail of the specification.

Subject criteria are intended to:

- help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies
- define the relationship between the AS and A level specifications, with the AS as a subset of the A level
- ensure that the rigour of A level is maintained
- help higher education institutions and employers know what has been studied and assessed.

Any GCE specification that contains significant elements of general studies must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

## 2. Aims

- 2.1 AS and A level specifications in general studies should encourage candidates 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.

## 3. Subject content

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

### Knowledge, understanding and skills

- 3.3 Thinking and analytical skills must permeate AS and A level specifications. These skills will be assessed by testing candidates' 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.
- 3.4 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.

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.

However, not all of the skills and subject content will necessarily be assessed in any one examination series.

- 3.5 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, and 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.

## 4. Key skills

- 4.1 AS and A level specifications in general studies should provide opportunities for developing and generating evidence for assessing relevant key skills from the list below. Where appropriate these opportunities should be directly cross-referenced, at specified level(s), to the key skills standards, which may be found on the QCA website ([www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)).
- Application of number
  - Communication
  - Improving own learning and performance
  - Information and communication technology
  - Problem solving
  - Working with others

## 5. Assessment objectives

- 5.1 The assessment objectives for AS and A levels are the same.
- 5.2 All candidates must be required to meet the following assessment objectives. The assessment objectives are to be weighted in all specifications as indicated.

Assessment objectives		Weightings		
		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%

## 6. Scheme of assessment

6.1 Assessment must be entirely through external assessment.

### **Synoptic assessment**

6.2 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 candidates 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. Candidates 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.

6.3 Examples of ways in which synoptic assessment might be conducted include essay questions requiring candidates to draw together knowledge, understanding and skills acquired and developed throughout the course and demonstrate transfer of skills.

### **Quality of written communication**

6.4 AS and A level specifications will be required to assess the candidates' quality of written communication in accordance with the guidance document produced by QCA.