**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Anthropology   **ANTH4**

(Specification 1111)

Unit 4: Practising Anthropology: Methods and Investigations

Report on the Examination

ANTH4

General

As this is the first time that ANTH4 examination was taken, it is hard to make generalisations based on the performance of the A2 Anthropology students. There did not appear to be any one question that caused particular difficulties for students and answers for the most part were of sufficient length. Students were generally able to manage their time effectively and to complete all questions.

It was a pleasure to see the original and imaginative choices made by students in selecting topics for their Personal Investigation (PI). To judge from answers to the questions in Section B of the paper, there were some outstanding PIs conducted by the students.

Positive features:

- Most students attempted all required questions.
- Some very good PIs were conducted and this was reflected in the very good answers for Questions 04, 05 and 06.
- There was an awareness of the specific demands of Unit 4, particularly the connections between research methods and PI.
- Some students used detailed, contextualised ethnographic studies in the discussions about research methods.
- There was appropriate use of relevant concepts and anthropological theories.
- Answers often showed knowledge of the work of specific anthropologists (both ethnographic and theoretical).
- Some students showed explicit knowledge of methodological issues in their PI.
- Some students successfully used their own experience of carrying out a PI in order to support arguments in their answers to Questions 01, 02 and 03.
- Better answers applied a range of perspectives and concepts in order to develop their analyses and discussion of the ethnographic examples.

Key Issues:

- Some PIs gave rise to serious ethical concerns that centres must address. Covert participant observation was a method used by some students in their PIs. This is both worrying and unacceptable. Centres must ensure that no student is permitted to conduct covert participant observation. Further, a very small number of students conducted the PI in relation to recreational drug users. The centres concerned should not have permitted this. Such proposed investigations should have been vetoed at the point when health, safety and ethical issues were discussed prior to the collection of any field data. Anthropological fieldwork should **always** be overt and students should never be permitted to carry out fieldwork in any setting that might compromise their safety or involve them in potentially illegal practices. It is the responsibility of centres to guide and mentor their students throughout the process of doing their PI and students should not be allowed to begin to gather data until their teacher has reviewed the PI and given permission for fieldwork to begin.
- Students should avoid doing PIs in busy shopping centres and they should avoid surveys in high streets. Data gathered from such settings tend to be rather thin and superficial and do not generally produce strong PIs.

- Some centres used more typically sociological than anthropological research methods such as structured interviews for their PI. While some anthropologists may use structured interviews as part of their data gathering method, this is never the sole or main research method used and is always supplemented by more clearly anthropological qualitative methods such as participant observation (PO), unstructured or semi-structured interviews, and life histories. Students should be encouraged to focus on these latter methods and other qualitative methods. Fieldwork defines anthropology as a discipline and distinguishes it from other social sciences. Indeed, this is one of the strengths of the discipline which students should be encouraged to experience through their PIs.
- Students should avoid conducting PO in their own home. The majority of students who did PO at home did not produce work that was of a high standard.
- There was a lack of use of anthropological theory in some students' work. Alternatively, there was the inclusion of theoretical material that was not directly relevant to the question.
- Effective time-management in conducting the PI is essential; it appeared that some students did not manage their time well and were left with too little time to complete their PI to a sufficiently high standard. Good planning and preparation are crucial.
- There was sometimes a lack of precision in contextualising ethnographic material, with too many over-general and therefore weak statements about research methods.
- A2 Anthropology students should not use Bruce Parry to support their arguments unless they are critically assessing methodological issues and are highlighting differences between entertainment media programmes and serious anthropological fieldwork.

Question 01

Many students were successful in examining some of the problems of using objects displayed in museums in order to study cultures. However, less successful students sometimes named and discussed museums in general without addressing the requirements of the question. There was tendency to list problems without adequate analysis. Nonetheless, a good proportion of students did achieve full marks or close to full marks on this question. It was pleasing to note that many centres seemed to have taken the opportunity to visit the local ethnographic museums in preparing students for the A2 examinations. This helped students in providing relevant examples from their visits in their answers.

Question 02

This question was well-answered by a good proportion of students who gained high and, in a few cases, full marks for their answers. However, some students failed to gain marks, often by only describing the personal interest of the ethnographer as the sole factor influencing an anthropologist's choice of topic to study. Better answers used ethnographic examples to support their discussions and arguments. Many answers, however, had a tendency to be descriptive rather than analytical, listing some of the factors rather than examining them in more depth.

Question 03

This question highlighted a division between students who had studied the debates of objectivity and value freedom in conducting fieldwork and those who had not. Less successful answers either listed some possible obstacles to being objective in the field or attempted answers that were loosely based on weak ethnographic examples, such as Margaret Mead's work in Samoa and Malinowski's diaries. Some students used generalised sociological arguments with a lack of suitably contextualised ethnographic examples to support their arguments. However, stronger answers used appropriate examples from applied anthropology and ethnographic examples where anthropologists have taken sides during their fieldwork. The very best responses to this question were focused and often included ethnographic examples to support their arguments. These students were able to outline relevant debates and evaluate these in relation to the issues of fieldworker objectivity and the possibility of value-free research.

General observation for Questions relating to the Personal Investigation:

Those students who conducted PIs using anthropological research methods such as participant observation and spent sufficient time in the field, were able to answer Questions 03, 04 and 05 with ease and gained high marks in their answers.

Question 04

As mentioned previously in Key Issues, there was a problem in some PIs where students conducted covert PO. Most of these PIs were in the student's own workplace where research was not permitted. This was problematic on two fronts. Firstly, on ethical grounds, students should be open about the research they are carrying out. Secondly, these students were unable to learn about the specific issues within these settings as they were too busy working and it was hard for them to detach themselves from their jobs and observe the culture of the work environment objectively. Also, a few students conducted PO studies of nightclub drug culture and some were in potentially harmful situations. This is not acceptable and all centres should make it clear to students that under no circumstance are they permitted to undertake research in a social setting in which they might be at risk, or involved in, or present during, any illegal or potentially illegal activity.

Less successful students offered solutions describing how they overcame their practical problems, or alternatively explained some ethical issues or their personal roles in the PI. From their answers, it is clear that some students did not allow for enough time in planning and conducting their PI and when they realised that they were not going to be able to gain access to the originally planned field they had to act quickly and change their place of study. In most instances this meant that they were unable to complete their PI. The most successful students clearly explained the practical problems that they experienced in their investigation. These students applied anthropological concepts to their PI with ease and with full understanding.

Question 05

This question clearly divided those students who had actually undertaken the PI from those who had not. Some less successful answers offered some solutions as to how to overcome the problems encountered with their presence without referring to the physical and social settings of their PI. The best answers were able to describe the physical and social setting of their investigation and explain how their presence in this setting may have affected their findings. Stronger answers used anthropological concepts and theories and produced responses that demonstrated explicit and sound understanding of the relevant issues.

Question 06

Unfortunately, this question was not well-answered by a number of students. Many students did not use examples from ethnographies or anthropological theories to support their answers and relate to their PI. The less successful students wrote only about their own PI without reference to any anthropological or other relevant material. Centres must ensure that students are guided throughout the process of designing, conducting and writing up their PI. Part of this includes encouraging the study and discussion of ethnographies and theories that relate to the PIs of students. Some students had a tendency to discuss their research method in general terms as they lacked relevant and appropriate anthropological literature and arguments that were clearly linked to their own PI. Stronger responses were better able to integrate and apply anthropological concepts and theories to the PI. A few students were able to examine the ways in which anthropological arguments and evidence related to the investigations they undertook.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion