

Critical Thinking

Advanced GCE A2 H452

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H052

OCR Report to Centres

June 2013

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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Overview

When considering performance across the four units this session, the following common characteristics were prevalent. You may wish to consider these points when preparing candidates for the examinations:

Performance and subject specific terminology

In the June session as a whole, there was a wide range of performance from those that gave very focused answers using subject specific terminology, to those that gave answers that relied largely on native wit, giving no responses to questions that demanded a technical answer. In order for candidates to access the full range of marks they do need to be familiar with specialist terminology, especially in F501 Section B where the application of credibility criteria is key and similarly in F503 questions 3 and 4 with the application of principles and criteria.

Some candidates may have approached some questions with pre-determined sets of answers, such as F501 argument element indicator words and F503 criteria and principles, which they applied whether or not they were appropriate to the text or issue. Candidates need to respond to the precise requirements of the question, with keen attention to the specifics of the questions on the paper.

Analysis

Candidates' strength of performance overall lay in identifying the different argument elements, which they did with precision and clarity. In F504 they need to take this further by showing a greater understanding of the relationships between these elements, for example which reasoning leads to which intermediate conclusion. Practice, using argument maps relating to whole arguments may help candidates to acquire an appreciation of this wider context.

Evaluation

Candidates ably identified where reasoning was strong or weak. They need to go on to develop explanations of these to show *how* they strengthen or weaken the reasoning, for example their impact upon the argument or claim in order to access the marks beyond those of partial performance.

Making a judgement and writing your own argument

Strong responses appeared to have been planned so that they were focused, precise and concise. Precision, rather than verbosity needs to be the aim in answering these questions. Structuring of the longer answers was more in evidence especially in F501 question 10, and F503 question 3, with one point per paragraph; as was providing structured and developed arguments, using a variety of argument elements in F502 and F504. Those who labelled their argument elements (such as MC, IC, R) usually had clear structures, even if their labels were occasionally incorrect. The inclusion of indicator words and phrases flagging up argument elements seems to be more helpful to candidates than giving annotations.

F501 Introduction to Critical Thinking

General comments:

This session saw a marked difference in performance between those candidates that focused upon the specifics of the question using specialist terminology and those that used native wit to produce eloquent often narrative, nontechnical answers. The performance of the former tended to be evenly spread across the paper, whilst the latter fared better in Section A, where the use of specialist terms is less of a requirement.

Q1 and Q10 evidenced the greatest range of performance. Q4 was again found to be the most challenging and Q5 the most accessible together with Q8. There was a noticeable increase in the number of No Responses in this session, mostly in Q2, Q3 (a), Q4 and Q7.

Most answers reflected close attention to the detail of the questions. This often lapsed in Q3 missing the element of 'saving money'; occasionally in Q8 where some gave only one claim for each part question and significantly in Q10 where the plausibility and final judgement were seen as whether the closure of libraries should go ahead, rather than whether the closure would have limited or serious effects.

Specialist terms were ably used and related reasoning readily identified in Section A. The need to apply credibility criteria in Section B led to a marked difference in performance in some candidates who had given strong answers in Section A. Candidates need to have a firm understanding of these criteria, as they are required to apply them throughout Q7, Q9 and Q10 which carry 36 of the marks on this unit.

Most candidates completed the paper in the time available and within the confines of the answer booklet. Those that finished abruptly did so towards the end of Q10 and this was usually associated with lengthy answers elsewhere. Candidates should be advised to take the space provided as a good indication of how succinct their answers can be made to be and to check with previous mark schemes as to specific instances of how this can be achieved. Where candidates wrote material on the additional pages this was usually well identified with the number of the question with which they were continuing. Occasionally candidates continued Q10 in an additional answer booklet without first using the continuation sheets at the end of their initial booklet, which should be discouraged.

Illegibility on some scripts continues to be a problem, especially towards the end of the answer booklet where many are writing more quickly. In a subject where the assessment can be affected by a single word, it is important that all words can be read. Where a candidate's normal way of working within a centre is to use a word processor answers can be typed and a word processing cover sheet filled in. Alternatively centres may provide a transcript with the script and it is also possible under certain circumstances for centres to seek permission for candidates to have a scribe. The number of typewritten scripts is in fact rising each session, possibly in response to this problem.

Comments on individual questions: Section A

- 1 Where candidates identified the correct part of the text, they tended to do so with precision, without omission or paraphrase. The strongest also avoided including additional argument elements. Common omissions and additions were those indicated in the mark scheme. There were more than usual crossings out and arrows to other answers, perhaps indicating that candidates were re-visiting questions after having had second thoughts prompted by subsequent questions.

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- 1(a)** The strongest answers identified this correctly without the preceding counter assertion.
- 1(b)** Many candidates identified all three examples correctly, even if they were enshrouded in additional material. Incorrect answers tended to state three pieces of evidence or the names of the authors.
- 1(c)** This was well answered, the strongest remembering to include both condition and consequence. The counter argument occasionally figured here incorrectly.
- 1(d)** Most were careful to include both the conclusion and the reason. *'Libraries are the preserve of the middle classes'* was a popular incorrect response, probably prompted by the 'however' that followed it.
- 1(e)** Most were able to correctly identify two argument element indicator words. *'Surely'* figured incorrectly in many answers, whilst *'including'* was rarely identified. Words that can perform this function, but were not present in the text were commonly given, suggesting that some might be coming to the examination with a rehearsed list. There were very few instances of words that were far from the mark, such as *'claim'* or *'point'*.
- 2** Where candidates correctly identified 'reason' in 2(a), they usually went on to gain both marks in 2(b). There was a significant number of No Responses for both.
- 3(a)** Many gave carefully focused correct answers. Others either gave answers accounting for library visits per se such as *'Schools arrange for students to visit libraries'*, or narratives as to why children visit libraries, such as *'Children do not visit the library to read books, but to use the Internet'* or explanations of who takes children to libraries.
- 3(b)** The strongest answers focused on the question's requirement for a comparison in relation to 'saving money'. Others gained partial performance marks for picking up on the comparative nature of the question, comparing the builder with others who valued or behaved differently. Candidates need to think carefully as to how to phrase their answers to ensure that they make the comparison explicit. If they did not to begin with a statement about the builder and then go on to state how others may be different, their task in making the comparison explicit was more difficult. Beginning with *'others'* implied a comparison, whilst beginning with *'some people'* usually meant going on to make a simple statement without comparison.
- 4** Strong answers focused upon the digital options and books rather than upon what *'kids'* might do or want or choose. Many either restated the reasoning *'Kids need to throw books'* or challenged with *'Children DO throw books.'*
- 5** Most drew upon the comparison between books and digital options. Only a few added in extra argument elements by giving examples or a further conclusion or more usually by giving two reasons.
- 6** Those that focused upon the link tended to express their evaluation in a succinct manner. Many assessed the reasoning in the paragraph as a whole, rather than the link between the reason and conclusion and thus gained partial performance marks. A number evaluated the reasoning without identifying the conclusion, therefore missing out on a very accessible mark.

Section B

This section was generally less well answered than Section A. The following points are given for guidance on key areas of misunderstanding:

- Candidates need to have a firm grasp of the credibility criteria to access marks throughout Section B. They particularly need to be aware of the difference between bias and vested interest.
 - With regard to vested interest, assessments need to make clear how this affects the claim such as a vested interest to exaggerate or be selective or misrepresent or indeed to be accurate and honest. To state that a source has a vested interest in something such as libraries doesn't assess how this affects the credibility of the claim or document or side.
 - With regard to reputation, candidates cannot presume a *good* reputation unless one is given in the materials, although a vested interest to maintain the professionalism of an organisation or the trust of the public may be appropriate.
 - Candidates need to look at the sources carefully to decide what stance they are taking, before they begin what would otherwise be focused assessments. For example the children's author was for *change* so could not be assessed in Q9 or Q10 as being for *closures*. Additionally the Department for Culture Media & Sport simply presented statistics, so cannot be attributed to either side in Q10, although their statistics could be used to support plausibility in Q10. The advice is therefore that candidates, when they are first reading the documents, should establish exactly where each source stands in relation to the question posed in Q10.
- 7 Candidates need to be aware that to access the third mark, they have to give a relevant reference to the text to support their assessment, as this mark was rarely accessed. Strong responses often cited 'the standards set out in the 'Code of Practice for Official Statistics' to support expertise, reputation and neutrality. Some dealt the representativeness of the figures presented in the bar chart or consistency with other claims or validity because of missing data and could gain no credit.
- 8 Strong answers gave carefully selected pairs of claims and sets of statistics accurately stated, gaining full marks. Where the two claims were dealt with together in a narrative without specific reference to the text, answers gained a partial performance mark. Those answers that could not be credited gave only one of the two required elements in each part of the question or occasionally selected claims from a different paragraph in Document 1 from that specified in the question.

More specifically, candidates occasionally read the graph wrongly giving the leftmost column as the youngest age group. Many cited 'static' and then did not refer to more than one year in the statistics. In Q8 (b) some cited the lack of data in the earlier years as showing inconsistency with eg packed with under 10s and many thought that '*regular library users*' were inconsistent with those '*using a library at least once a year*'.

- 9 Strong answers carefully applied appropriate credibility criteria in assessing the credibility of their selected claim. Partial performance marks were accessed where there was no reference to the chosen claim or where one claim was selected and a different claim was assessed. The weakest responses were within striking distance of gaining marks, as although they did not apply a credibility criterion, the assessment was often headed in the right direction.

Many candidates used bias, when vested interest would have been correct as there was something to gain or prevent losing, usually the librarian avoiding the loss of her job. Some attempted to use a credibility criterion negatively, for example '*they have no expertise in*

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architecture, which could not be credited as the source might well have expertise in all sorts of areas, including architecture. Others made implausible statements, as in Q9 (b) that the author lacked ability to see because they did not go to libraries or because they had not been to *'ALL the libraries'*.

Most indicated whether their assessment weakened or strengthened the credibility of the claim, thus gaining a mark.

- 10** Candidates as a whole structured their answers well, giving forceful reasoned cases supporting both scenarios, limited and serious negative effects. Weaker answers gave arguments for and against library closures and the weakest came to no judgement at all.

The skill lay in attributing the correct sources to each side. The strongest answers gave very compelling, carefully crafted assessments of those on each side, often succinctly, comparing credibility in terms of one credibility criterion throughout. With a little extra, some candidates could dramatically improve their performance. These answers usually very ably assessed an individual source on each side and then stopped short, by either doing little more than mentioning a credibility criterion in relation to another source, or by leaving their assessment at one source. Candidates need to be clear that the question asks them to assess the relative credibility of sides and to do that they need to assess at least two sources on each side.

Some assessments of credibility could not be credited because they discussed credibility only in negative terms, for example, *'we do not know his reputation'* or when looking at the credibility of the blogger, *'we do not know whether he has expertise in libraries'*. The weakest answers mentioned credibility criteria, either singly or in lists, in relation to sources with little or no explanation eg *'The retired builder has no expertise, some neutrality, little ability to see, some vested interest and no reputation. He isn't very credible.'*

In relation to plausibility, the strongest answers expanded upon improving reading through technology rather than through books and used the statistics to demonstrate how libraries are well used and for more than just borrowing books. The tendency was to develop the ideas given in the text rather than to come up with completely new ideas. Weak answers tended to summarise at length most of the resource material without bringing it together with further comment or adding in new ideas. The weakest discussed plausibility in terms of credibility.

Looking at the performance as a whole, candidates both strong and weak gained marks over the whole paper exhibiting a wide set of skills.

F502 Assessing and Developing Argument

General comments on Section A:

It seems necessary to take this opportunity to draw centres' attention to the Instructions to Invigilators and Examination Officers: "*Examinations Officers should ensure that the two parts of the examination are dispatched separately, as these need to go to two different locations.*" It was discovered that a few centres had not dispatched the MS4 Multiple Choice Answer Sheets separately to the rest of the question paper as instructed. As the two go to different locations centres need to make sure they dispatch them separately to avoid this issue in the future. There seemed to be no issues regarding timing for candidates on the Multiple Choice Section of the unit.

Comments on individual questions for Section A:

- 1 This question discriminated very well between candidates.
- 4 This was another question that discriminated very well.
- 6 A very high percentage of candidates performed well on this question, suggesting that it did not discriminate as effectively as others.
- 8 Many candidates incorrectly chose option C (appeal to history). Candidates should be reminded that not all arguments that refer to history are making an appeal to history.
- 9 Most candidates scored the mark on this question.
- 12 This question on spotting an assumption proved to be the one where candidates performed least well, with the majority choosing option D incorrectly. Candidates would do well to remember that assumptions don't have to be implausible weaknesses, and in this case the assumption is highly plausible.

General comments on Sections B and C:

In Section B, candidates were able to engage with the topic of "Reducing the voting age" which was relevant to them and of equal interest to both boys and girls. Overall there was little evidence that candidates ran out of time, showing that candidates planned answering the questions well and took into account the time restraints they had.

For questions 17(c), 19(b) and both parts to question 21, the most efficient way for candidates to access marks was to spot a point of evaluation ("what"), explain it ("why") and then say "how" it either strengthens or weakens the conclusion *about the voting age*. Just to say that it strengthens or weakens the reasoning was not enough to get the third mark this was an omission which could easily have been rectified.

Another pitfall for these questions for weaker candidates was to deny the truth of a reason given in the text, or produce a counter assertion, which runs the risk of being regarded as a *counter* rather than as an evaluation. Even more commonly seen was a response which merely paraphrased, or even quoted, what the author was saying and then called it a strength. Another frequent cause of loss of marks in evaluation questions was the failure to realise that a statement taken from the text cannot be an assumption.

Comments on Individual Questions:**Section B:**

- 16(a)** Candidates performed very well on this question.
- 16(b)** Candidates performed very well on this question.
- 16(c)** Candidates generally performed poorly on this question. Many candidates who got the correct answer also added the supporting reason (“they would feel...”), thereby losing a mark.
- 17(a)** The majority of candidates got this correct with the remainder mostly not aware that an appeal is not an argument element, and so identifying it as an appeal to emotion, presumably due to the rather hyperbolic language used in the conditional statement, meant a mark lost.
- 17(b)** Candidates often wrote “it has (the indicator word) ‘if’” and that was deemed as a weak explanation of why it is a *hypothetical* reason, but not accepted as a sufficient to count as a reference to the text, even if it was in inverted commas. The very best answers here quoted the two halves of the hypothetical reason and said which bit was the *condition* (or *antecedent*) “if we do not listen...” and which bit the consequence (or the *consequent*) “they will become”. There were other ways of getting full marks.
- 17(c)** Few candidates seemed to appreciate the subtlety of the argument in Paragraph 2. It assumes (very plausibly) that giving the vote to 16 and 17 year olds would give MPs and policy makers a vested interest in listening to their views. Conversely, not lowering the voting age means “we are leaving it to chance” whether or not their views are listened to, and if, as a result, they are not, then they will become angry, etc. Most candidates seemed to respond to what is possibly their own view of the argument which can be summarised as “by not giving the vote to people aged 16 and 17 it means we are not listening to them, and therefore they will become angry etc”. The mark scheme therefore gave credit to answers based on this somewhat oversimplified interpretation and distinguished three approaches to this (labelled J, K and L) and in better answers it was clear which of these links the candidate was addressing.

Full marks were rare, largely because to get the “How” mark, candidates had to write something along the lines that “the reason does/does not strongly support the conclusion about *voting*”. There was an alternative way of getting full marks (a ‘What’ plus a very well explained ‘why’) but this too was rare. Some candidates thought that hypothetical reasoning is always inherently weak as it deals with an uncertain outcome in the future.

Many candidates identified the inference as a slippery slope in one form or another, although the quality of explanations of this varied. Quite a few pointed out, quite reasonably, that 16- and 17-year olds don’t have the vote now, but the stated consequence of “not being listened to” has not occurred. More detailed explanations of terms used above can be found in the mark scheme.

It was also noted that a number of candidates misinterpreted the rubrics and lost marks by writing in 17(c) answers which would have been creditworthy in 17(b) and vice versa.

- 18(a)** Candidates generally performed well on this question.

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- 18(b)** Although the text says “one of the *reasons* why”, this is the everyday use of the word ‘reason’ and as it is an explanation, the second half of the quote is not a reason in the technical critical thinking sense. A good way (but not the only way of getting full marks) was to label the two bits of the explanation as *cause*, the desire/need “to encourage more people to vote” and the *effect* “compulsory citizenship was put into the national curriculum”. Quite a few candidates unnecessarily tried to relate the given statement to other elements in Paragraph 3, rather than confining their discussion to the quoted text.
- 19(a)** The question does say “identify *precisely*...” and therefore required the exact words use in the text, and not synonyms. Small changes were allowed where they helped the flow of the answer, such as “*learning*” is compared with “training” and “age” is being compared with “trivial entry requirement/colour of shoes” on the grounds that the word from the text, “young” is an adjective, and some candidates, not unreasonably, felt uneasy about comparing an adjective with a noun, though that, too, was given full credit for point Z in the mark scheme. The most common synonyms which lost marks were saying “not being able” instead of “not being allowed”, and “being taught” instead of “learn(ing)” and “trainers” instead of “(running) shoes”. Candidates generally identified the ‘marathon’ elements correctly, but lost marks by failing to match these accurately to their ‘voting’ counterparts.
- 19(b)** Most candidates identified a relevant difference (or similarity). Differences which don’t appear to have any relevance were not credited, such as “Citizenship lessons happen indoors whereas marathon training is (normally) done outdoors”. Better candidates were able to say “*whY*” the difference they have identified matters. The third mark proved harder for some to access because it required a very clear “*whY*” or a “How” which mentions what the conclusion is about (lowering the voting age). The most common answer that attracted marks seemed to be the relative unimportance of running in a marathon, compared to voting, which made the age restriction non-trivial.
- 20(a)** The majority got this correct, with appeal to popularity being the most common mistake.
- 20(b)** The best answers explained, with reference to the text, why an appeal to history does not offer strong support to the reasoning. Suggestions as to why, in this case, history might not be repeated (ie differences between the issues of votes for women and for 16 year olds, or differences between the Isle of Man and elsewhere) were not credited as they are not evaluating the *appeal to history*.
- 21** The idea that people who are prone to risk taking should not vote is less plausible than the idea that immature people should not vote, so it was slightly easier to access higher marks by referring to Paragraph 7 than Paragraph 6. In Paragraph 6 the author begins “Most young people...”, and whilst it would strengthen the argument if it were true that *all* young people are immature, one cannot say, as many candidates did, that the author assumes this, or must assume this, or makes a generalisation that this is the case. Full marks answers for either evaluation were very rare.

Section C:

For questions 22 and 24, generally candidates who provided strong responses took a little time to plan their answers, to ensure that repetition was avoided and different strands of reasoning were provided. Those who labelled their argument elements usually had clearer structures, even if sometimes their labels were wrong. Indicator words such as “so” or “as” in the middle of a sentence are good signs that the reasoning is developed and it was noticeable that the inclusion of such indicator words and phrases has been very helpful to candidates.

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Candidates who provided strong responses always stated the main conclusion clearly and did not change the gist of the question. Some answers were somewhat spoiled by the continuing practice of inserting spurious statistics. Where appropriate, it is fine to say that “Surveys have shown...” or “Research suggests...” but there is no merit in padding out answers with imaginary percentages from non-existent professors, least of all when the values and/or level of precision are implausible.

Candidates should look at what space is being given in the question paper for an answer and understand that full marks can be achieved within this. Writing longer answers does not necessarily mean that higher marks will be achieved, with precision in the writing important. Structure and development seemed better across both questions than in previous sessions. Candidates seemed familiar with both contexts and so often communicated strong opinions with those who were unable to moderate these producing weaker responses which were emotive or rhetorical in nature. Less proficient responses often relied heavily on local or temporal examples to move the argument forward with the reasoning being quite terse and the example being necessary to develop it. There were fewer flaws, particularly slippery slopes, evident.

- 22** The question has always asked for a “counter *argument* and response” but the distinction between whether it has been judged “strong” or “weak” has always depended more on the quality of the *response*, rather than on whether the candidate has given a counter argument or a counter *assertion*. Many weak responses were of the type, “Some say ... but they are wrong” which showed no more than a superficial understanding of any opponent’s view. Additionally, candidates who used the argument indicator word ‘however’ to introduce their counter often were unable to give a counter and response. Candidates should be advised that ‘however’ often indicates that a counter has preceded it, rather than introduced it.

The reference in Paragraph 4 of the text to student councils reminded candidates that students already have quite a lot of influence, so the reference in the claim to even “greater influence” led some candidates to consider quite extravagant claims for the areas over which students might have an influence – teachers’ lesson plans, what subjects should be in the curriculum, and finance and school budgets, for example.

SUPPORT

Responses which supported the claim that students should have a greater influence needed to have at least one of their two reasons (or the response to the CA) address the issue of “greater” and in practice we were looking for some comparator, (more, better etc) beyond merely repeating the claim “greater influence”. Weaker answers merely argued for students having *an* influence, or lacked a comparator.

Some responses went down a sidetrack of suggesting strategies for how greater influence could be achieved (more frequent student council meetings for example). If these are given *examples* of how greater influence works it is acceptable, but in most cases they took up the bulk of the response and meant that the candidate was arguing towards a different main conclusion.

CHALLENGE

Students not having a greater influence could be taken either to mean less influence, or none at all, so the need for a comparator was not applicable.

- 23** The most common cause of losing a mark was to add other argument elements (such as a conclusion or an example). However most candidates did well on question 23.

- 24** Whilst it does no harm to include a counter argument and response in question 24, the fact that some candidates did this in a formulaic way and then failed to attempt an intermediate conclusion makes it likely that they had not noticed that the instructions are different from those for question 22. Absence of a clear intermediate conclusion here, either strong or weak, was a problem for many candidates. Sometimes it was only the labelling on the script which flagged up what was *intended* to be an intermediate conclusion, where there was no inference from any of the reasons to the intermediate conclusion or from the intermediate conclusion to the main conclusion. Many candidates seemed to fail to address the question as set, but a few wrote essays explaining what the aim currently *is* (or is not) rather than what it *should be*.

SUPPORT

It is easy to argue, as many did, that unemployment is bad for the individual and for the country, and clearly it is *necessary* for employment to be desirable if we are to claim that “the main aim of schools should be to prepare students for *employment*” However, it is not *sufficient*, and so reasoning that *only* concentrated on how important it is to get a job could not count as “strong” – there had to be some reasoning about why *schools* should be involved. This could be done whilst arguing that other aims, such getting students to pass exams, develop social skills and moral values, or appreciate the beauty of art, literature, music or mathematics, etc all have spin-offs which contribute to a person’s employability.

Different candidates focused on one or more aspects of preparing for employment, such as preparing students to *choose* a job (careers advice), to *apply* for a job (CVs and interview skills), *qualifying* for a job (exams) and *doing* a job (key skills). It is quite understandable (albeit economically naive) that candidates who supported the claim took the view that solving the problem of unemployment was primarily a matter of better preparation in schools, rather than, say, policies which promote growth and increase the *demand* for labour, as opposed to simply increasing the quality of the *supply* of labour.

CHALLENGE

On the face of it, it seems hard to argue that schools should not prepare young people for employment when employment is clearly desirable. A challenge is most likely to take the form of saying that it is people other than schools who should do the preparation – further education institutions, parents, or the employers themselves. Alternatively candidates might accept that preparing for employment should be done by schools but should not be the *main* aim. Establishing rigorously what should be the main aim as explained above is hard if not impossible. All one can really expect to see is a defence of some alternative as a possible main aim. That is why the Acceptable Conclusions in the mark scheme states “The main aim of schools should not be to prepare students for employment (but rather they should....)”.

Once again, to be ‘strong’, reasoning shouldn’t just address the merits of some alternative aim, but should also refer to employment as well. Another way of opposing the claim is to interpret “prepare students for employment” in a more narrow way, limiting it to preparing students to go straight into employment when they leave at 16 or 18. Such candidates could then argue that it was more important for schools to prepare students for university or FE, or even encourage them to start up their own businesses.

F503 Ethical Reasoning & Decision-making

General comments:

Candidates seem to have found the topic fairly congenial and accessible, and they were aware of it as an ethical issue. However, candidates and their teachers are advised that because each session focuses on a different ethical issue, it is not feasible to choose in advance criteria for use in question 3 or principles to be applied in question 4.

In order to prevent candidates from handicapping themselves by choosing too narrow or specific a choice, they were given three choices to choose from in questions 3 and 4. Some candidates lost marks by not differentiating clearly enough between the second and third of these choices. The simple techniques for saving water identified in Document 3 related naturally to the option to “avoid wasting water”, whereas the use of grey water systems, as described in Documents 4 and 5, related more obviously to the choice of “reducing water usage to the minimum”.

Some candidates implicitly regarded water as a non-renewable and relatively scarce resource, like oil. This misunderstanding led them into making some unpersuasive arguments and judgments. Others suggested that if consumers in the UK were to use less water, the surplus would become available to parts of the world where water was short (eg in Africa).

Examiners again reported that a number of scripts were very hard to read. Centres are urged to make appropriate arrangements for candidates whose handwriting may prevent them from receiving full credit for their ideas and reasoning.

Comment on individual questions:

- 1 There were several correct approaches to identifying a difficulty in definition regarding the word “waste”, and many candidates achieved full marks in at least one half of the question. Most weak answers said enough to gain at least one mark. Very few candidates focused on what might be considered to be the most significant answer, namely that “waste” is a value-laden word, which intrinsically begs the question, but a lot pointed out that different people would have different ideas of what constituted waste and therefore of how to avoid it. Almost the only answers which scored nothing were those which claimed that the word “waste” might not refer to water at all, which in the context of the question and the resource document was clearly incorrect.
- 2 In this question many correct answers were available, and most candidates identified two of them. The most popular answer to 2(a) was that households with water meters were likely to save water because doing so would save them money. The most popular answer to 2(b) concerned the leakage rate tolerated by water companies, although not many candidates gave a full explanation of why this might discourage consumers from saving water. Answers to 2(b) which were simply the obverse of 2(a) without any additional reasoning were capped at 2 marks. A few candidates misunderstood what was required and discussed the credibility of the document instead of its content.
- 3 Almost all candidates accepted the suggestion of using “effects on the environment” as one of their criteria, but some of them had only a vague idea of what those effects would be. A fair number, however, made good use of the resource documents or their own knowledge in order to make valid points concerning this criterion. Some combinations of choices and criteria – such as “use as much water as you like” and “ease of implementation” – offered very little to say by way of evaluation, although ease of implementation was a good criterion by which to evaluate either of the other two choices.

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Several candidates used broad categories as criteria such as "practical", "social", "ethical", with the result that their assessment was not clear; in some cases, the content of these assessments duplicated a previous section of the answer, such as effects on the environment. Others offered a discussion without identifying a specific criterion. A significant number are still using public opinion as a criterion, with little or no substance to their assessment.

- 4 There were a few very good answers to this question. The most persuasive and successful answers tended to argue in support of the moderate choice, by contrast with both of the extremes. Answers which supported one of the extremes by rejecting the other were open to the criticism that they had restricted the options. The marks of a few candidates were limited because they did not make use of principles and/or of the resource documents provided. As usual, the question required both.

Most candidates presented their arguments clearly, dividing their answers into separate paragraphs, each of which focused on making a single point. Many of them helpfully ended each paragraph with a summative intermediate conclusion.

In addition to principles derived from major ethical theories, several free-standing principles were relevant to this issue. Several candidates made use of a duty to protect the environment and a duty to future generations, but not many of them argued in favour of those duties. The right of everyone to have access to clean water was mentioned by several candidates, some of whom justified it by reference to the right to life, while others pointed out that the right to clean water has been recognized by the United Nations. Most candidates applied Hedonistic Act Utilitarianism to the issue, and some of their discussions were developed, detailed and persuasive, while others were more perfunctory. It was not too difficult to apply the first version of Kant's Categorical Imperative to this issue, and a number of candidates did so, but few candidates if any made persuasive use of the second version. Some candidates managed to relate Libertarianism to consumer choice, but principles which related to public policy (such as Paternalism) were not credited.

Most candidates addressed issues of credibility of the documents to which they referred, but not many discussed the plausibility of the claims. In particular, almost everyone who made use of the suggestions in Document 3 (as many candidates did) accepted the claims of how much water could be saved by simple techniques without questioning the calculations, even though most of them seemed rather surprising and almost certainly based on dubious assumptions (such as that no one already prefers showers, or that the use of a cistern displacement device never or rarely requires the toilet to be flushed more than once). A few candidates discussed the credibility of the sources without using them in support of their own reasoning, which was not credited.

As in the January session, several candidates reduced their mark by changing the focus of all or part of their answer to public policy instead of individual life choices. They may have read the question carelessly or they may have been misled by an intention to include Libertarianism and Paternalism in their discussion of whatever issue was presented to them.

F504 Critical Reasoning

General comments:

This paper seemed to be appropriately demanding, discriminating better in some questions than others but overall performing well. On the one hand, questions 2 and 3 (analysis questions) were more accessible than has been the case in previous series, but on the other hand, question 4 (the evaluation question), required candidates to compare two long and complex documents and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. Candidates seemed to find this question more challenging compared with previous series and some candidates were either unable to finish the task or do so with only limited success. Therefore the relative ease with which candidates seemed to approach questions 2 and 3 was offset by the greater challenge of question 4.

There was overall a reasonable spread of marks. All examiners agreed that the subject was interesting and that candidates were able to engage with the resources and responded well to the topic.

Comments on individual questions:

1 There was just about an equal spread of candidates who thought it was/was not an argument. Few candidates had much to offer in terms of “justified thinking about the types of reasoning present” - for example, some candidates think “appeal to emotion” is an argument element. On the other hand, many were able to justify their decision reasonably well. Some candidates persist in evaluating this question, rather than analysing it. This point has been made in earlier reports but it continues to occur.

2 There was a good deal of implicit awareness of the limitations of inferencing, although only the better candidates identified the causal/correlation flaw by name. Also those candidates who distinguished between baseball bats and metal batons as being significant in regard to the question were able to access the higher marks. The few candidates who realised that the evidence would support the statement that it was ‘a conclusion that could be reliably drawn’ normally accessed the top mark. Many suggested other ways evidence could be interpreted which gained credit.

However, several candidates wasted time on credibility issues. Candidates who scored within Level 2 tended to counter and retort rather than justify their answer: for example they stated that there was no proof that the sales were by rioters, that it could have been baseball fans etc. Despite the resource being identified as from the UK because of the pound sterling currency indicated, some candidates argued that online sites were global so sales could have come from anywhere in the world.

3 This question seemed accessible for candidates, with many scoring over half the marks. Almost all candidates were able to identify the main conclusion and at least two other elements accurately, although some omitted vital information concerning the structure of support or presented simplistic diagrams which did little to illuminate the link between elements.

However, there was also discrimination in those accessing the higher marks between candidates who could differentiate between the counter-assertion and counter-conclusion in the counter argument and those who recognised the different elements of the invalid syllogism (called evidence/explanation/example’ variously) and were able to note that it was an indication of ‘poor reasoning’ by the police.

- 4 This question differentiated well with the whole range of marks being given. However, candidates need to be advised in these comparative resource questions that they must decide which is the stronger document and make an explicit judgement. Otherwise, despite making good evaluative comments, should they fail to come to a judgement, they will be unable to access the higher grade bands.

There was a feeling that the volume of material requiring evaluation was the biggest challenge to candidates as few candidates seemed able to get a complete overview/synthesis of the two documents and therefore were hampered in their efforts to compare strengths and weaknesses.

In some answers there was certainly far too much description and/or analysis in place of evaluation and a great deal of the evaluation was superficial and not searching. Weaker responses merely judged the authors' credibility and many of the important points noted in the mark scheme were not touched on at all (ie the lack of responses to counter arguments or human rights considerations).

Some candidates merely paraphrased parts of each document and claimed that this was "a strength" or "weakness". The more acute answers came from candidates who were able to compare directly in terms of particular themes/strengths/weaknesses in each document: those that found the inherent contradictions in Document 3 and the confusions in Document 4 were able to access the highest grades.

- 5 This inclusion of the word "ever" in the statement helped to provide a good discriminator as so many candidates seemed able to wholly ignore utilitarian considerations and declare that under no circumstances would violent protest ever be justified. The better answers attempted to define key terms, especially "violent protest" and "moral justification", but although many candidates have been taught to attempt to define terms, the ability to recognise the key ones and apply them skilfully to the claim at hand is often lacking.

Where candidates did manage to use a/some definition to narrow the perimeters of an argument, this worked well and they were able to access higher marks if they came to a convincing conclusion to their argument. However, evidence of "accomplished argument structure" was only found in a few answers. Again the best answers were those that concluded that violence could be justified in extreme circumstances.

Lower level answers used recent examples and/or appeals to history (eg London riots/Syrian/Libyan demonstrations/Woolwich soldier murder) to move the argument forward. Also because of the inclusion of the word "ever", some of the attempts at counter argument were forced and could be identified by stock phrases such as "Some people may...". There are a small, but it seems growing, number of candidates who use ethical principles to try to answer this question. It does not necessarily deter them from accessing the highest levels of marks but often it is used instead of well-developed reasoning rather than as a support to it. The lower level responses tended to include made-up statistical or historical, or even personal, evidence or just paraphrase large tracts from the stimulus material and present it as argument.

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