

Level 2 Award

Thinking and Reasoning Skills

OCR Level 2 Award in Thinking and Reasoning Skills **J930**

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

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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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CONTENTS

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OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

Content	Page
B901 Thinking and Reasoning Skills	4
B902 Thinking and Reasoning Skills Case Study	7

B901 Thinking and Reasoning Skills

General Comments:

Although some questions on the paper succeeded in discriminating, overall the paper did not perform as well as might have been hoped. In particular, candidates found Question 9 very challenging and so it was harder for candidates to achieve well in AO3 than in previous sessions, despite a similar candidature.

Overall, candidates were prepared well. This was evident from their ability to use and explain terminology such as *ad hominem* and false dilemma. Compared to previous sessions, fewer candidates confused criteria for choice with credibility criteria.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A

Question 1 (a)

Most candidates identified the conclusion, with candidates being credited whether or not they included the example. Less successful candidates tended to select the final sentence, which demonstrated a lack of understanding of what is meant by a conclusion.

Question 1 (b)

Most candidates were able to identify one of the two reasons.

Question 1 (c)

Map A was the correct map because the reasons operated independently. Many candidates selected Map B because they considered the two reasons to be joint, although it is unclear why. Few candidates selected Map C.

Question 1 (d & e)

In part (d), candidates were able to identify advantages and disadvantages of a price being £1 rather than 99p, but fewer were successful in part (e) when asked to identify a possible consequence of the introduction of a 25p coin. Credit was given to candidates who identified consequences which were possible but not necessarily likely. However, extreme and implausible consequences, were not credited, for example, it is difficult to see why the introduction of a 25p coin would mean the elimination of the 10p or 5p coin.

Question 2

This question discriminated well, with Statement C being the most frequently incorrect response.

Question 3 (a)

Most candidates correctly identified a list of information.

Question 3 (b)

Parts (b) and (c) were successful discriminators. More successful candidates were able to recognise that five names formed 70% of all names, but this 70% was not necessarily divided equally between the five names. Less successful candidates generally chose Chart C. Some candidates wrote about the credibility of the journalist (biased) but such answers were not credited.

Question 3 (c)

In part (c) many candidates were confused between the two studies and wrote about men named Robert, Thomas or William.

Question 3 (d)

Was chosen correctly by the overwhelming majority.

Question 3 (e)

Was answered successfully by those who chose bias but less successful candidates tended to opt for ability to see.

Question 4 (a)

Proved to be relatively straightforward, with most candidates gaining all four marks.

Question 4 (b)

Was answered well, with most candidates both using and explaining the term *ad hominem*.

Question 4 (c)

In part (c), it was felt that both the third and fourth option should be credited, with far more candidates opting for the fourth than the third. Most unsuccessful candidates opted for the second option.

Question 4 (d)

Successful candidates focussed on questions somehow relating to the question of fairness and questions suitable for a survey. Successful candidates also recognised that the question was not about whether the present kit should be changed but how often kits should change.

Question 4 (e)

Only a minority of candidates used credibility criteria. As with part (d) the issue was not whether the kit should change, but how frequently it should change. 'Cost' in general was an acceptable criterion, but the issue was cost to the supporters rather than cost to the club (because the cost of manufacturing the kits will always be recouped by the profit margin).

Section B

Question 5

The assumption question discriminated well. As always, an assumption should be something unstated but nevertheless something relied upon by the author.

Question 6

Most candidates correctly chose option 2 in the table and parts (b) and (c) were generally done well, with most candidates recognising the need to compare both sides of the analogy.

Question 7

There was an error in the stem of the question which confused a small minority of candidates. To ensure that these candidates were not disadvantaged, examiners credited those who chose criterion Z for Document C and those who wrote about the animal rescue charity worker. Most candidates chose the criteria successfully but many did not succeed in achieving the marks for the explanation because they tended to summarise the arguments in the documents rather than focussing on the vested interests. More successful candidates recognised and explained that the guide dog owner, the insurance company and the veterinary surgery stood to gain financially.

Question 8

The majority of candidates were able to use and explain the term 'False Dilemma'.

Question 9

This question proved very challenging and many candidates struggled to achieve beyond Level 1 (1-3 marks). The arguments of many less successful candidates took the form of a rant as

candidates struggled to understand why animals should be treated any differently from human beings. It was perfectly acceptable for candidates to argue that animals should have the same rights as humans but examiners expected reasoning and could not give credit where there was only assertion. Many less successful candidates wrote arguments about the need for an animal NHS and how it could be funded through a tax on pet food. This may have been acceptable as a response to an anticipated counter argument, but it was not, in itself, a positive reason for the given conclusion. Many candidates wrote about the trauma likely to be suffered by the owners whose pets are euthanised, without recognising that it is the owners who generally make the decision. Many candidates wrote about it being 'cruel' to put a sick animal to death, without recognising that many owners make this decision when they consider it to be the kindest course of action. Document D defined euthanasia as '...the act of preventing the suffering of an animal...' but this seems to have been noted only by a minority.

The question asked candidates to consider a proposal to ban euthanasia of pets with 'treatable illnesses', but very few candidates recognised that this encompassed a wide range of conditions. Many less successful candidates assumed that 'treatable' must mean that the animal could be restored to full health. The question asked candidates to write a letter to their local MP but examiners did not insist upon this. Some candidates did lay out their answer as a letter, even including their address, telephone number and email contact details. It was good to see that quite a few candidates knew the name of their local MP.

Question 10

This question was much more accessible than Question 9. Only the most successful candidates recognised that 'working animals' could mean a very wide range of animals, not just the examples specified in the documents. Some candidates had odd ideas about the use of army horses. At least one candidate claimed that army horses were responsible for Britain winning the Second World War and many believe that they still play an active combat role in the British armed forces. However, many candidates were able to identify two reasons why it is right that working animals should have free healthcare (most argued in support) and the more successful candidates developed their reasons.

As in previous sessions, centres are advised that the main discriminator is the quality of the reasoning. The presence of at least two developed reasons will allow a candidate to access the top mark band. A developed reason will often include indicator words such as "therefore" or 'because'. Undeveloped reasons are likely to invite the response 'and so...?'. Candidates are urged to use paragraphs to structure their arguments carefully. Some candidates included counter-arguments. In this subject, counter-arguments are never necessary unless specifically asked for. If candidates do decide to include counter-arguments, they must remember to dismiss them. The purpose of a counter-argument is always to knock it down.

B902 Thinking and Reasoning Skills Case Study

General Comments:

It was pleasing to see many strong performances in the June season of the B902 paper. It was clear that candidates had engaged positively with the chosen topic and the close proximity of the centenary of the Battle of the Somme hopefully provided both relevance and further context for the controversy caused by the Sainsbury's ad based on the Christmas Truce.

This is a thinking skills qualification which doesn't require additional knowledge beyond that given in the resource booklet to answer the questions. It must be remembered, however, that the documents are available on pre-release in advance of the examination taking place and that it is recommended that centres spend up to six weeks studying these materials. This should provide ample time to explore some of the issues raised in the documents and to build some understanding of the theme of the paper.

For instance, in Question 3, where candidates were asked to provide possible explanations for the decrease in deaths over the Christmas period, there was no expectation of any knowledge of trench warfare. Where this appeared in plausible answers, such as the suggestion that no attacks were launched and that this reduced the number of deaths as troops remained protected in their trenches, credit was given. Answers which suggested that the troops were moved to different places were not credited however, as the graph which provides the stimulus for the question refers clearly to the whole of France and Belgium. This is, therefore, not a plausible explanation if reasoning and thinking skills are applied using the information available and this is absolutely at the centre of the assessment criteria for this qualification.

The run of four questions from 4 (a) through to 5 all assessed skill 4 – evaluating the credibility of sources. These questions proved to be some of the best discriminators on the paper. It has been noticeable over the last few seasons that a significant minority of candidates find it difficult to access questions assessing this skill. Sometimes this is due to an apparent lack of familiarity with the credibility criteria. There are five criteria listed in the specification and the support materials available provide some excellent ways of studying these.

Another common problem with some approaches to credibility questions can stem from the way candidates interpret the question. Question 4 (b) here required candidates to, 'Explain how expertise could be used to weaken the credibility of Royal Mail's claims.' Some answers approached this question by suggesting potential sources of expertise which could give additional strength to the claims, such as asking an historian to verify them. Whilst this could be seen as a literal interpretation of the question, candidates are not applying the criterion to the source, which is the skill being tested.

A final comment on credibility is that candidates should be encouraged to focus on the specific details of the source rather than relying on generic approaches to credibility criteria. Answers which suggest ability to see strengthens a source's claim because 'they were there to see it', or which suggest vested interest weakens a source's claim because 'they have something to gain' will rarely be enough to gain credit.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A

Question 1 (a)

A big majority of candidates correctly identified the word 'so' as the conclusion indicator word in this argument. It was surprising that a small minority omitted this question, failing to circle any

word at all within the argument. It is not clear why this happened, but centres should encourage candidates to attempt all questions, especially those where a selection needs to be made.

Question 1 (b)

Most candidates recognised that the reasoning here was independent.

Question 1 (c)

Having correctly answered part (b) most candidates were able to explain clearly why the reasoning was independent. Many did this by explaining that each of the two reasons could support the conclusion on their own, others simply by saying that the two reasons were not linked. This question proved to be a very good discriminator, with stronger candidates much more likely to gain credit.

Question 2 (a)

This proved to be a straightforward question with the vast majority of candidates able to identify both the conclusion and the one reason in the argument provided.

Question 2 (b)

It was very pleasing that almost as many candidates were able to identify the full structure of the argument as could identify its individual components. This was structured in a fairly straightforward way with indicator words such as 'although' and 'so' being present. However, this sort of question has proved more difficult in the past and again, the vast majority identified the correct structure.

Question 2 (c)

As is so often the case candidates found this assumptions question to be one of the hardest on the paper in terms of providing an accurate answer. The most common error which candidates make on assumption questions is to lift something from the argument itself and this was the case here with a large number using the claim that the ad '*makes you all warm and fluffy inside.*' It cannot be repeated too often that assumptions are always unstated and therefore cannot be lifted straight from the argument. The most common creditable answers here focused on the idea that the argument relied on the assumption that ads should be historically accurate or on the assumption that people have been complaining because of the historical inaccuracy.

Question 2 (d)

Most candidates correctly identified the sentence as an explanation. It was pleasing that candidates were able to recognise that the indicator word 'because' here was part of an explanation and not indicating the presence of a reason within an argument. Surprisingly, a significant minority of candidates saw this as a list of information.

Question 3

Most candidates were able to identify at least one relevant and plausible explanation for the decrease in deaths shown on the graph with many identifying two. The most common successful answers focused on the weather, the Christmas period and a lack of ammunition. As has been mentioned in the general comments, candidates who suggested that troops might have moved to different places could not be rewarded, nor was credit given to answers which suggested decreases in deaths due to disease, as this was not a plausible explanation in the context of the picture of the First World War given in the pre-release material.

Question 4 (a)

Most candidates were able to provide a creditable reason as to why ability to see strengthened the Royal Mail's claims. These most commonly focused on their access to letters written by soldiers who actually fought on the Western Front.

Question 4 (b)

This proved to be the most accessible of the three skill 4 credibility questions relating to the Royal Mail's claims. Candidates were able to identify their lack of expertise as a postal service with no claims to particular historical understanding. It was noticeable that a significant minority of candidates referred to the Royal Mail as a newspaper, presumably confusing it with the Daily Mail. Again, as the documents were available in pre-release, this sort of confusion should be avoidable.

Question 4 (c)

This question proved to be the most challenging of the credibility questions, although it also discriminated extremely well. The vested interest really relied on the fact that the Royal Mail was issuing commemorative stamps and other memorabilia for sale and they therefore had a vested interest to promote public interest in the truce.

Question 5

This was another credibility question and candidates found this more straightforward than any of the three parts of question 4 on the Royal Mail's claims. A majority of candidates were able to gain both marks here, almost always by using the criterion of expertise, supported by the source's position as a Professor of History at St Andrew's and/or the fact that he had written a book on the subject, to show how the credibility of his claims were strengthened.

Question 6 (a)

Given some difficulties that candidates have had with identifying straw man flaws in the past it was pleasing to see that a significant number were able correctly to identify this flaw. The most common incorrect answer was false dilemma, although all four given possibilities were seen in reasonable numbers across the scripts submitted.

Question 6 (b)

Again, it was good to see that nearly all candidates who correctly identified the straw man were able to follow this up with a valid explanation, usually focusing on how the original argument had been distorted or misrepresented.

Question 7 (a)

Analogy questions have always proved challenging in the past so, again, it was pleasing that a large majority of candidates were able to access marks for both Q7 (a) and Q7 (b). In the case of 7 (a) most candidates were awarded one of the two marks available. The most straightforward way to gain both marks was to explain the similarity that both situations were using something which was not true to reality in order to gain commercially. Most answers seen covered part of this (either the untruth or the commercial aspect) but not the whole similarity.

Question 7 (b)

Unusually for analogy questions, candidates performed relatively better in explaining a relevant difference than they did in explaining a similarity. Most candidates clearly understood the need to deal with both sides of the analogy and many did this very well, often focusing on the lack of any historical truth behind Santa's grotto, whereas the Sainsbury's ad was based on an historic event.

Question 8

This proved to be the most challenging question on the paper with a majority of candidates unable to access any marks here. This was a question which was assessing candidates' ability to explain the weakness in the reasoning, in other words the lack of perfect fit between the reason and the conclusion. In this case there were two main ways of doing this: either to identify a valid assumption or to recognise that just because so many chocolate bars were sold, it doesn't necessarily mean that this was a result of the ad. Candidates who saw a false appeal to popularity here were awarded one mark as this did address an aspect of the reasoning but was not integral to arriving at the conclusion.

Question 9 (a)

This question was very successfully answered, with candidates being well rewarded for taking their time to scan the documents for the statements given. A majority of candidates gained either 6 or the full 7 marks available.

Question 9 (b)

Nearly all candidates were able to access some marks for this question and very few were awarded fewer than 2. Many gained full marks with two developed alternative explanations. The key to success here was in ensuring the explanations were developed. The most straightforward way to approach this was to give a reason for differences in the accounts, such as being positioned in different places along the trench, and then to develop this into an explanation with '..... and so', such as '*each soldier experienced something different during the truce.*'

Question 10 (a)

Most candidates were able correctly to identify the best description of the use of the ethical concept 'right' in the context which it was used in the document.

Question 10 (b)

This was another example of a question where most candidates were able to provide valid answers, but where it proved a lot more challenging to gain both marks available. Again, the key to gaining both marks was to develop the reason given. Some unsuccessful answers produced reasons which supported rather than challenging the author's view.

Question 11

This question was generally well answered with nearly all candidates able to produce at least one relevant question about the photograph. The most common answers focused on where and when the photograph was taken; with other successful approaches including questions about the presence of a football and about exactly who the people in the picture were. Answers which posed questions about who took the photograph could not be credited as this would not have helped to determine whether the photograph provided evidence for the football truce having taken place.

Section B

Question 12

Again, nearly all candidates gained some marks for this question, though few were able to gain all four. Many answers made use of scenarios or examples to support the reasons given and these were most successful when the examples provided were relevant and plausible. More extreme scenarios citing the use of murder to raise money for charity for example, were considered implausible.

Question 13

This question discriminated well. There were few responses which fell below Level 2, and very few indeed which gained fewer than 3 marks. Equally, however, there was also a shortage of really good Level 3 answers, although some exceptionally good responses were seen. The most successful answers were those which went beyond the specific case of the Sainsbury's ad and made use of the stimulus referring to films such as *Braveheart* and *Titanic*. It appeared evident in some cases that this may well have been an issue explored in the classroom when discussing the pre-release materials. Answers which were entirely dependent on the context of the Sainsbury's ad for examples and evidence tended to lack the development of the reasoning required to reach Level 3. A small minority of responses presented balanced arguments, with some reasoning in support of the view given and some challenging it. Whilst effectively refuted counter-arguments can enhance an argument, balance was not what was asked for. Centres should make it clear to candidates that their reasoning skills and ability to attract AO3 marks are best achieved by presenting a clear response which supports a decisive conclusion.

Question 14

There were some impassioned arguments presented in response to this question with more candidates choosing to argue that Remembrance Day should continue beyond 2018. More Level 3 answers were seen than in Q13 and some well-chosen evidence was used in support of the reasoning. Candidates should be reminded; however, that clear reasoning is more likely to be achieved through logical argument than through arguments which rely too much on polemic.

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