

Level 2 Award

Thinking and Reasoning Skills

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

OCR Report to Centres June 2017

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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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B901 Thinking and Reasoning Skills

General Comments:

The paper performed well and the candidates engaged with enthusiasm. Candidates were generally prepared well for this assessment, as was evident from the good number who used technical language, such as the names of flaws and appeals. As is often the case, candidates found it difficult to distinguish between necessary and sufficient conditions. Most candidates were able to distinguish between credibility criteria and criteria for choice.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A

Question 1 (a):

Most candidates were able to achieve full marks on all parts of the question. Where candidates failed to identify a reason, this was usually because they bracketed only part of the first sentence.

Question 1 (b):

This was an appeal to history (something will not happen because it has never happened before) but candidates who identified it as an appeal to tradition could be credited if they explained the weakness in the reasoning. A popular incorrect response was to identify the weakness as a false dilemma.

Question 1 (c):

Only a minority of candidates recognised that getting to an interview on time is neither a necessary, not a sufficient condition of getting the job.

Question 2:

In part (a), successful candidates recognised that the reasons operated together, or that they depended on each other, or that they were connected. Just recognising that there were two reasons was not enough to be credited with a mark.

In part (b), successful candidates recognised the false dilemma, but a surprising number identified the flaw as a slippery slope.

Question 3 (a):

As always, many candidates failed to achieve full marks because they failed to understand what constitutes a pattern in data. Some candidates made general observations, for example that there were more males than females, or that more males than females liked cats. Patterns must link more than one common and there must be more than one instance, so credit could not be given for identifying that only males had a snake as their favourite animal. A lack of precision was common, for example referring to females liking horses instead of horses being their favourite animal. Successful answers tended to start with the words, "all", "none" or "only". Unsuccessful answers often started with "most" or "many".

In part (b), successful candidates recognised the importance of sample size and of the representativeness of the sample. Less successful candidates very often referred to there being an odd number of people in the survey (nine) and of there being unequal numbers of males and females.

In part (c), successful candidates often distinguished between facts or opinions. This was an important item in the assessment and it was good to see it answered well.

Question 4:

Candidates were generally successful in their numerical problem solving for part (a).

In part (b), successful responses tended to be a question or a comparison of the two modes of transport. For example, “which method of transport would be cheaper?” would be a better response than “how much does it cost to travel by car?”

Question 5:

The Venn diagram proved to be a good discriminator. Most candidates managed to at least put the number 4 in the middle.

Question 6:

This proved to be a relatively easy matrix question.

Section B

Question 7:

The candidates engaged enthusiastically with the subject matter and the majority identified the correct documents to match the claims.

Question 8:

The majority identified relevant credibility criteria to assess the claims made by Gaz and Gloria. In the case of Gaz, most focussed on his vested interest or bias. Gloria's credibility proved more challenging to assess. Lack of expertise was not credited because Gloria being a psychologist is not evidence that she has no expertise with tattoos, nor is it accurate to say that she is biased against tattoos because she doesn't have any.

Question 9:

Most candidates assessed both sides of the analogy. It was important that they demonstrated that they understood the analogy. For example, the point that hair colour is easier to alter than a tattoo is not relevant to discrimination.

Question 10:

Most candidates were successful with parts (a) and (b). Many identified part (b) as an appeal to popularity but credit was also given for an adequate explanation. Part (c) proved very challenging, with the majority simply repeating part of the text.

Question 11:

As always, the reasoning was the most important element of the argument questions, with two developed reasoning being required of a top band response.

Candidates are strongly advised to use paragraphs to achieve a coherent structure.

In part (a), candidates could argue in either direction. Reasons about the use of fake ID were more convincing when applied to arguments in support of the statement.

Less successful responses often involved assertion in the place of reasoning.

Question 12:

A minority of candidates misread the question and argued in the wrong direction. When arguing in the right direction, many confused “is” and “ought”, for example by pointing out that many employers judge job applicants by appearance without arguing that such discrimination can be justified. Nevertheless, there were many excellent top band responses to this question.

B902 Thinking and Reasoning Skills Case Study

General Comments:

In the penultimate sitting of B902 as the Level 2 Award in Thinking and Reasoning Skills approaches its final year, candidates engaged very positively with the topic of performance enhancing drugs in sport. They largely seemed well prepared for the examination, both in terms of their skills and subject specific vocabulary, but also from their obvious awareness and understanding of the material gained from study of the pre-release Resource Booklet.

Having made comments in previous reports concerning the deployment of AO3 skills in Section B, it was pleasing to see a number of strong responses to Q10 and Q11 (b). There was clear evidence of more developed reasoning, making good use of evidence available in the documents in the Resource Booklet. There was also more original material seen in answers, particularly to Q11 (b), and a number of cogent and persuasive reasons were given which allowed a significant number of candidates to access level 3 marks in one or both questions.

There were also improvements seen in applying skill 4, evaluating the credibility of claims in sources. Having made comments about some of the weaknesses seen in answers to questions assessing this skill in the June 2016 report, it would appear that Centres have responded to these from the evidence seen in answers to Q8 (b).

In this series, questions requiring candidates to identify assumptions and counter arguments were less effectively answered, as was Q3 (b) which asked candidates to name and explain a common flaw. These sorts of questions can quite easily be practised by Centres and it would be especially helpful if they were to do so making use of the pre-release Resource Booklet, as this is available in plenty of time before the examination is sat. The more time that is spent studying these materials, the better prepared candidates will be to respond to the questions in the examination.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A

Question 1(a):

A majority of candidates correctly identified the sentence as an argument, although a surprising number incorrectly saw it as a rant.

Question 1(b):

As is often the case, this assumption question proved to be the most difficult one on the paper. Assumptions questions are always likely to be the most challenging of those testing skill 1. They require candidates to identify a gap in the argument, and therefore something which isn't there, whereas other questions asking for argument components to be identified are looking for elements which are written in the argument itself. In this case, many candidates suggested the assumption was '*that he ruined people's lives*'. As this is stated in the original argument however, this cannot be an (unstated) assumption. Centres are encouraged to make it explicit to candidates that all assumption questions require an answer which is not part of the argument as it is written.

Question 2(a):

Both parts of this question proved to be straightforward with the vast majority of candidates able to identify both the conclusion and one of the two reasons in the argument provided.

Question 2(b):

A good majority of candidates were able to correctly identify the reasoning in the argument as joint. It proved a lot more challenging, however, for candidates to explain why this was. Fewer than half were able to explain the need for both reasons to be included for the conclusion or the overall argument to be made.

Question 3(a):

This question, requiring candidates to identify the argument component as a counter argument, was an excellent discriminator which stronger candidates tended to answer correctly. A majority of candidates could not identify the component correctly however, with a number suggesting it was an example of an appeal to emotion, which is a flaw or weakness in an argument rather than a component. Candidates who named the component as a counter assertion also gained the mark. Strictly speaking this is the correct term as there is no conclusion within the counter, however the term counter assertion is not included in the specification for this qualification, so there is no expectation that candidates would be aware of this term.

Question 3(b):

This question, requiring candidates to identify and explain a straw man flaw proved to be more challenging than some flaw questions on previous papers. A minority of candidates correctly identified the straw man, though it was pleasing to see that the majority of those who did identify it were then able to explain why it was a straw man, usually by saying that the original claim had been distorted.

Question 4:

This was a well answered question, with a majority of candidates gaining full marks and very few who were unable to provide at least one valid alternative explanation. The most common answers suggested the sportspeople either lacked the talent or the training to win. Those who suggested they might have been injured in a race or disqualified in an event did not gain credit as these answers are not valid when asked why hardworking sportspeople had failed to win '*time and time again*'.

Question 5:

This was another well answered question which also discriminated well. Despite the problems which many candidates had with the straw man flaw in question 3 (b), the majority were able correctly to label all four of the common flaws here, with very few candidates identifying all incorrectly. The most common mistake seen was confusing the false appeal with the tu quoque example, possibly because these have been less commonly seen on past papers.

Question 6:

This question discriminated effectively. In past series, candidates have sometimes found questions asking them to explain differences within an analogy quite challenging, but they largely responded well to this question and a good majority were able to gain full marks. A commonly seen effective approach was to contrast the impact of murder on another person with the taking of drugs impacting on the person himself/herself.

Question 7(a):

This question tested candidates' ability to recognise which conclusions could and couldn't be drawn from a set of data. Whilst a good majority of candidates were able to gain at least half marks on this question, relatively few were able to secure full marks. This is an important skill within the specification and Centres are encouraged to make use of as many examples as they can where surveys and other data are used to support statements and conclusions. Often, as in this case, the information provided cannot support many of the conclusions which are drawn.

Question 7(b):

This question proved to be one of the best discriminators on the paper with stronger candidates able both to identify and explain weaknesses in the survey. Most candidates were more able to

do the former, by identifying the small sample or limited range of people asked, than to explain how this unrepresentative sample made conclusions difficult to sustain. A number of weaker responses focused on the details of the responses given, rather than on the skill 5 focus of recognising common weaknesses in polls. Such answers could not be credited.

Question 8(a):

As is often the case with questions requiring candidates to complete a Venn diagram based on scanning sources for information, this question rewarded those who took their time to read the two extracts carefully. The vast majority of candidates gained at least 3 marks here, with many accurately placing all five statements correctly within the Venn diagram.

Question 8(b):

This was another question which discriminated extremely well. Strong candidates were able to identify credibility criteria and to apply these to the specific claim that was the focus for the question. It was pleasing to see that, following comments made in last June's report, very few purely generic answers relating to credibility criteria were seen and most candidates were able to make use of criteria such as ability to see, expertise and reputation in relation to Armstrong's claim. It is worth reminding candidates that where somebody makes a claim about something from which they can gain personal advantage, the criterion they should be using is vested interest. A number of weaker candidates used the term bias to explain a weakness in the credibility of Armstrong's claim and whilst this could often earn them partial credit if explained, it is difficult to award full marks for an answer where a criterion is incorrectly used.

Question 9(a):

This question invited and received a very wide range of valid answers. Some candidates chose to maintain a fairly narrow focus on correcting natural disadvantages to improve ability within the sporting arena, which was a perfectly acceptable approach to this question. Others ventured outside the world of sport and focused on more everyday disadvantages such as hearing loss or poor eyesight, with equal effectiveness. A few answers focused on the use of performance enhancing drugs, but these answers could not be credited as this cannot be interpreted as correcting a natural disadvantage.

Question 9(b):

As with responses to Q6, to gain full marks on this question, responses needed to refer to both sides of the comparison being made. This is always likely to be the case with any 2 mark question requiring candidates to explain differences or to provide reasons why two things are different. This question was another good discriminator with most candidates able to identify two reasons or to provide at least one developed reason. The strongest answers here tended to focus on the fact that correcting a natural disadvantage enables sportspeople to compete on a level playing field, whereas performance enhancing drugs take sportspeople beyond others.

Section B

Question 10:

Having seen a long run of series where relatively few candidates have been able to produce level 3 answers to questions inviting a longer response to demonstrate AO3 skills, there was a clear improvement seen in this question. A very significant minority of candidates were awarded at level 3 because they were able to produce two developed reasons. The development came as a result of using evidence to support the reasons, such as the deaths of cyclists demonstrating the severe health risks from doping, or through the use of joint and independent reasoning to support interim conclusions. Weaker answers often focused an argument against the proposed legalisation of doping on the idea that doping is cheating and provides an unfair advantage. Such reasoning lacked the cogency and persuasiveness required to reach level 3, even if it was developed, because it did not relate clearly enough to the conclusion. If doping was to be made legal, then sportspeople would no longer be 'cheating' or creating an 'unfair' advantage over

their rivals, because this would be within the rules. Indeed, some of the minority of answers which argued in favour of the legalisation of doping successfully adopted this approach as part of their argument that such legalisation would create a more level playing field.

Question 11(a):

As with question 9 (a), there was a wide range of potential answers here and most candidates performed well on this question. Straightforward responses such as make-up, tattoos or hair dye were successfully used. Some answers could not be credited because they focused on enhancements which would only plausibly be used by sportspeople, such as streamlined clothing to reduce wind resistance.

Question 11(b):

The second high tariff question assessing AO3 was also well answered by many. There were slightly fewer level 3 responses than Q10, but again the stronger candidates were able to provide developed reasons to support their conclusion. In addition to the development of a reason, the other key factor in gaining level 3 marks here was the inclusion of a counter argument. This was explicitly asked for in the instructions for answering this question and candidates should always make sure they read the requirements carefully as they can vary slightly from series to series. Successful answers here often argued that enhancing our natural selves can have very positive mental health and emotional benefits and supported this reasoning with examples. Where candidates argued against the contention that enhancing our natural selves is wrong, they often used a counter argument which suggested many religious people could argue that individuals should accept what God had created. As long as this counter argument was then successfully rejected then this was again successful.

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