

Critical Thinking

Advanced GCE A2 H452

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H052

Examiners' Reports

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

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Chief Examiner's Report

The candidature for all four units remained stable, following an established pattern of the majority of centres entering candidates for unit 1 at AS and unit 3 at A2 in January, leaving units 2 and 4 to be sat in the summer session. This arrangement works well, especially at AS level, where candidates tend to confuse the skills required for the two units after only a term's teaching. This tends to impact negatively upon their answers and marks in many cases where both are entered together.

The quality of performance in the longer questions in each unit (Q10 Unit1, Q22 and Q23 Unit 2, Q4 unit 3 and Q4 unit 4) was particularly pleasing this session, especially in the upper mark ranges where candidates took advantage of the opportunity to use a range of their skills to best effect. Although candidates were organising their answers to target the marks, they also exhibited a freedom to express their judgements and arguments in a way that was both convincing and exhibited individual expression. In the lower mark ranges, these answers were more formulaic, but encouraging in that they used specialist terminology throughout to good effect, especially in the judgements required in units 1 and 3. This made the marking of them a great pleasure and should be seen as a tribute to those who have prepared them so well for the examination.

It was encouraging that candidates appeared to manage their time well across all four units, with fewer instances of (NR) no response to questions. At AS level candidates used the lined spaces in the answer booklet to be appropriately succinct, with fewer venturing into the additional pages to continue writing. However at A2 there were more instances of lengthy answers, in what were intended to be shorter responses, for example Q3 in unit 3 and Q1 in unit 4. Centres may like to advise their candidates that they should be guided by the marks available in the early questions and may benefit from practising the construction of concise answers, as the time spent on these questions may take away from that which could be usefully used in the questions with more marks available.

There have been increasing concerns about the legibility of answers across all units, as in some cases it has been impossible to decipher whole phrases. In a subject where an individual word may alter the meaning, it is important that the writing is clear. Where it is not, candidates face the possibility that they cannot be credited for sentences that elude the comprehension of the examiner. Although it is recognised that handwriting deteriorates under exam conditions and every effort is made to decipher answers, candidates might benefit from the knowledge that illegibility is impacting upon possible marks and centres may like to make arrangements for an electronic version of answers for those whose writing cannot be improved.

Where centres are looking to improve the quality of particular answers, they may find the observations that follow in the PE reports on the individual units most helpful. They identify the most common errors and also give best practice. The answers within the mark scheme also have a guidance column which teachers may find helpful, as it details where candidates give particular types of wrong answer and how these are handled. There continues to be a range of OCR training and feedback sessions in the autumn term which centres might also find useful.

F501 Introduction to Critical Thinking

General Comments

The January candidature remains stable at 13,600 entries. Where candidates had been entered for both AS units in January, there was more evidence than in previous years of Unit 2 skills appearing incorrectly used on the F501 paper, such as appeals being incorrectly identified in Q2(a) as an argument element. Centres might like to consider using the May session to enter candidates for Unit 2, to avoid possible confusion between the skills assessed in the Introduction to Critical Thinking and the more advanced skills assessed in Unit 2.

Candidates engaged well with the topic, often giving very spirited answers in Q6 which went both ways with regard to the waste of public money. However they came up with fewer ideas of their own in Q10, although their responses were adequate to gain the marks available. The detail of the documents was however not picked up by a significant minority, who attributed the comments made by Raleigh to Prince William, or even Prince Harry or Prince Charles; identified the author as thinking that the award scheme was a waste of money; claimed that Xtreme Gap was part of the award scheme and thought that Gapwork.com was a charity. This inevitably impacted upon their ability to gain marks. Candidates would be advised to spend time reading through the documents carefully, to fully appreciate the nature of the sources and precisely what they are claiming.

In contrast, there was pleasingly greater evidence this session of candidates reading the questions carefully and phrasing their answers to meet what was required. There were many insightful answers to Q6 and also to Q5 where reasons given were more relevant to the claim than in the past. However in Q10 many candidates wandered away from the task of the scheme boosting employability skills into discussing whether the scheme should continue; whether gappers would want to work when they returned; or a comparison between the award scheme and the Lifeguard Beach Training Programme.

It was encouraging that NR (no response) figured far less in this session, perhaps indicating that candidates had a broader grasp of the skills required, as they made a good attempt at the full range of questions; also that their time was apportioned well, as it was the exceptional script where the candidate did not complete the paper. Specialist vocabulary was widely used throughout, although in some instances credibility criteria were abandoned in Q10 which greatly limited the marks that could be gained in this question. This session saw a noticeable increase in the conflation of bias and vested interest, variously expressed as 'invested interest', 'vest of interest' and a reputation to 'withhold'. As candidates seem to choose this over other credibility criteria, it is important that they take on board that bias is not the criterion to use where the source has a motive to misrepresent the situation for gain. This misunderstanding meant that some candidates could not access a significant number of marks in Q7 and Q9.

There was an extremely wide range of performance, with very astute expertly formed answers in the 60 – 70 mark range, contrasting with commonsense answers that showed little evidence of critical thinking skills in the 20 – 30 mark range, although E grade scripts evidenced a wider skill range than in the past, picking up a smattering of marks in most questions. The proportion of candidates who demonstrated no familiarity with Critical Thinking terminology appeared to be very small. This undermined their ability to answer questions correctly or satisfactorily throughout the paper, for the most part leading them to gain under 30 marks

Strongest performance was evidenced in Q1(c) evidence, Q1(d) argument indicator words, Q5 suggesting one reason, Q6 assessing the link, Q7 credibility of documents and Q9 credibility of claims; whereas weakest performance was found in Q1(b) reason, Q1(e) examples, Q2 argument element, Q4 assumption and Q10 judgement based on credibility and plausibility. Candidates performed more evenly over the two sections this session. Centres may wish to use this to inform where to target extra practice to raise performance.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

- 1 Candidates were better this session at being directed by the paragraph numbers in each part question, such that instances of wandering off into other parts of the text were very exceptional. This was heart warming as it has been the cause of a significant loss of marks in the past. Pleasingly, candidates were also quoting precise elements from the text, rather than using paraphrase or ellipsis. This resulted in improved performance in question 1.

There was however an increase in ardently scribbled out answers either overwritten with replacements in minute letters; or squashed into the margin space; or arrowed from one question part to another. This suggests that many candidates were revisiting their answers, as they looked at the passage more carefully. In the event of this happening in future papers, candidates would be advised to put a single line through the original answer and to continue on the additional answer sheets at the back of the answer booklet, clearly labelling these replacements with the question number. This might facilitate the legibility of such answers.

- 1 (a) Given that the correct answer was introduced by '*so it should help...*' it was rather surprisingly that a significant number of candidates were attracted by the first, rather than the last sentence of paragraph 1. However, these candidates often went on to give the correct reason in Q1(b). A minority of answers left out '*when they returned to Britain*', thus preventing access to the third mark.
- 1 (b) Although the majority of candidates identified the reason, a significant number limited their marks by including the examples: '*like teamwork, leadership, project management and problem solving*', therefore only gaining one mark. Centres may wish to emphasise that separating out extraneous material is one of the skills tested by question 1.
- 1 (c) The vast majority scored full marks for this part of the question. A minority penalised themselves by omitting the opening phrase "In 2009", which had they thought about it, substantially alters the evidence.
- 1 (d) There was a marked improvement in identifying argument indicator words, even though these occasionally related to other paragraphs, eg *additionally* in paragraph 5. Mistaken answers included '*surely*', '*better*', '*help*', '*unfair*', '*claimed*', '*recommended*', '*beneficial*', '*could*', and '*particularly*'.
- 1 (e) Very few correct answers were given to this question. Those who identified the right area tended to write out the whole sentence, despite the leading words 'such as'. Others mistakenly quoted Raleigh or put Raleigh's words into the mouth of Prince William.

- 2 (a) Given the help provided by the introductory word 'since', surprisingly very few candidates correctly identified this argument element. Many candidates were misled into identifying *'hypothetical reasoning'* when they saw the word *'if'*. Erroneous answers included *'assumption'*, *'motive'*, *'quote'*, *'assertion'*, *'persuasion'*, *'appeal to emotion'*, and *'cause and effect'*. The limited number of argument elements is named in the specification on page 10, which might act as an aid to candidates in the future, if they are unsure of which elements may be identified.
- 2 (b) Where the correct answer was given to 2(a), the correct answer to 2(b) usually followed. However some candidates picked up partial performance marks for recognising that this element lent support to what was being argued.
- 3 This question had an interesting range of responses. For those who chose a format *'The BLTP cost under £2,000 whereas...'* there was ample opportunity for characteristics to be compared. However a significant number of answers gave bald statements, eg *'The BLTP only offered training in very specific job skills'* without any comparison, leaving the difference in characteristics to be inferred. This type of response gained only one mark.
- 4 This question differentiated well. Few candidates gave the preferred answer, most offering a version of the acceptable category of response in terms of guilt about gap year fun/enjoyment. A minority mistakenly linked the guilt with other things such as cost or employer involvement.
- 5 Answers tended to be better targeted than previously. Very few strayed into generality or irrelevancy. Most focused upon not learning the relevant job skills; jobs being taken by others whilst abroad; or gap years giving the impression of having a poor work ethos.

For many candidates this question still proves problematic, as they feel the necessity to add either an explanation or a second reason to their answer, thereby only gaining one mark. Often with a little thought what they have written could easily be reorganised to make it a three mark response, eg *'Gap year students might forget the skills they have learnt at university such as computing'* (1 mark) could be written as *'Gap year students might forget the computing skills they learnt at university'* (3 marks).

- 6 Candidates engaged well with this question, arguing for both weakness and strength in the reasoning in an often spirited manner. Astute answers recognised a degree of irrelevancy of the reasoning, in that it did not justify the expense of the award scheme by indicating that it improved job prospects through skills learned. Others defended worthiness (raising money of their own), need (having to prove inability to afford the costs) and efficiency (how the award was spent) as strength of reasoning against a waste of public money.

Disappointingly, a significant number of two mark answers gave sound reasoning explaining worthiness, need and efficiency, but stopped short of linking this with the claim that a waste of public money was unjustified. Centres may like to take up the point in teaching, that inference is not sufficient to gain full marks. *'The fact that graduates had to raise £1,000 to pay for their own immunisation and flights indicates that they were contributing some of their own money and so were committed to the project'* could gain two marks and if this is then clearly linked to the conclusion by saying that, *'This means that the public money is not wasted which is a strong link to the conclusion'*, the third mark can be credited.

In the weakest of answers the assessment was reduced to a passing reference to the reasoning, which could not be credited, eg *'What Prince William has to do with being successful is not clear.'* Surprisingly many misread the resource document and thought Prince William either had vouched for the efficiency of the expenditure or had received a bursary himself.

Section B

- 7 Strong answers successfully assessed the document, often in terms of expertise or reputation, with carefully chosen references to the text. However a number of candidates restricted their marks to one by assessing Raleigh rather than gapwork.com, although a minority of these rescued their answer by explaining that this assessment affected the document itself.

Quite a few candidates mentioned two or more credibility criteria, thereby muddling their answers, which sometimes included otherwise thoughtful and well expressed elements, eg *'The ability to perceive strengthens the credibility of gapwork.com. Because they are the biggest gap year information provider in the UK, they must have access to feedback from gap-year students and information from the government in order to keep this reputation, which they have a vested interest to maintain.'* Candidates need to streamline their answers to concentrate on one criterion for each part answer and to develop this alone.

- 8 This question evidenced accurate and precisely worded answers. Only a handful omitted to mention the source. Occasional lapses tended to be either in quoting Xtreme Gap twice or in quoting the wrong part of the critics' claim, *'...the awards were...an attempt to make youth employment figures look better.'* The majority of the NR (no response) tended to be in this question, suggesting that candidates found it quite a challenging task.
- 9 The requirement for the assessment of the person to be made in relation to the claim did prove quite difficult for some candidates, although many produced extremely good answers which were less formulaic than in the past.
- 9 (i) Almost all candidates gave a correct claim. In b(i) however some candidates cited a claim which the Founding Director was rejecting, rather than one he made. Centres might like to be aware that the choice of claim did impact upon the assessment that could be made, eg for the Xtreme Gap director it was far easier to make a relevant assessment related to expertise where the claim related to *'longer than 10 weeks'*, than it did to *'a questionable use of tax payers' money'*, although some candidates managed to turn this into a lack of relevant expertise.
- 9 (ii) There was a plethora of generic assessments, eg if candidates choose reputation they should appreciate that it is difficult to do so without a reference to outside people or agencies who support the person, eg The Higher Education Minister has a good reputation is unsubstantiated, unless the candidate refers to the fact that he has been voted in and therefore trusted by the electorate or appointed and therefore trusted by the Prime Minister. Similarly, just being a government minister does not make you an expert. However when he is referenced in terms of his post as Minister for Higher Education in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, it does provide him with the expertise to comment on the skills required by employers.

Many candidates also gave insufficient indication that they were writing about the particular claim which they had cited in part (i). However those that made this link did so succinctly, gaining all three marks within a short space, eg *'The minister would have expertise, this strengthens credibility. He works in the 'Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' so he would have knowledge of what traits and attributes would be valued in a workplace.'*

There appeared to be more evidence of confused bias and vested interest this session, eg *'As a company that is trying to bring in revenue the director of Xtreme Gap is strongly biased against the government, as it will take business away from Xtreme Gap. This weakens the credibility of the claim.'* In this answer vested interested is explained. Although this might be taken as a reason why the director might be biased, there is nothing in the response to explain the nature of his bias or how it is manifested. By contrast the following response clearly recognises and explains vested interest: *'The company has a vested interest to say that the scheme is not a good idea, as this means its own business looks more appealing. This weakens its credibility as the company has something to gain from saying the claim – increased revenue.'*

- 10** Level three answers demonstrated a firm grasp of the requirements of this question, carefully structuring their answers into sections on credibility and plausibility and then subdividing these sections into assessments for and against the view that the graduate bursary scheme was likely to boost the employability skills of those taking part. Sides were assessed with credibility criteria with full explanations; plausibility was well argued and a clear judgement reached.

Level two answers tended to be those that either omitted to assess plausibility or did so weakly simply reiterating the text briefly; or those that did not assess the credibility of a side, but limited their assessments to one source on a side, often more fully than was necessary.

Level one answers had a better grasp of the issues than in previous sessions, in that they were making a coherent argument towards a judgement which in most cases was explicit and in line with their reasoning. However they were not assessing more than one area strongly. Some were still answering in the style of the legacy specification in terms of weight and quality of evidence, instead of answering the question on the paper. Others compiled a list of the points made on each side of the question, often in the form of a series of quotations from the Resource Booklet. A further weakness was to mention a list of credibility criteria in relation to a side or source with no explanation of any of the criteria. At this level, plausibility was often awkwardly handled with the word itself distributed somewhat arbitrarily through sections mainly concerned with credibility. The fact that Xtreme Gap was in favour of gap years, but against the graduate bursary scheme led to confusion in some candidates' minds as to which side of the argument they were on.

In general, in terms of plausibility, many candidates were able to write positively about the sort of skills you might develop on such a scheme such as the ability to make independent decisions, so potentially making yourself more attractive to an employer. They found it harder to argue against this. However astute points were made about employment requiring very specific skills such as computing, which you may not have gained on a gap year; whilst people who had gone straight into work after university might have had a year developing their abilities in this area and so they would look more attractive at interview.

Overall, the quality of answers was improved, although this did not necessarily mean correct answers. However those teaching these candidates can be encouraged by the fact that there were fewer no responses; answers were targeted more to the marks available; there was a more astute use of credibility criteria and plausibility was tackled with more confident expression.

F502 Assessing and Developing Argument

General Comments

The entry for the paper was similar to January 2010 at about 2,000 candidates.

As in the previous sessions for the new specification, there was no evidence of time being too short for candidates on the paper. Hardly any questions were left blank and the further arguments often had accompanying plans on the additional pages, showing candidates had time to consider their reasoning on these. Candidates that did take time to plan like this generally seemed to do well.

On the 'state' questions on Q16, nearly all candidates now write with precision and do not paraphrase with their own versions. Centres are to be commended for passing this message on to the cohort so clearly.

The passage seemed to interest candidates and they were able to interact with it well, particularly on Q20. The nature of the Further Argument questions did lend themselves to emotive arguments, and a significant minority of candidates argued emotively, lacking credible reasons or convincing structure. As recommended before, centres would do well to practise this, perhaps by taking issues which candidates are tempted to argue about in this way.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

The questions on intermediate conclusions were found to be much more challenging than main conclusion questions. The types that candidates found the most testing were the assumptions questions, followed by the flaws.

Note that the mark scheme has a rationale for each question, and this should help to make this paper a good teaching aid for future exam sessions. The points below do not reproduce this rationale.

Feedback on some Individual Questions:

- 2 More than half the candidates identified D correctly. The rest were split fairly evenly across the options implying that many were unsure how to differentiate between reasons, evidence and explanation. Asking what part of the argument each option was supposed to explain would have helped here.
- 3 A significant number went for option A mistaking the author as making a personal attack on the environmentalists rather than making an attack on a misrepresented version of their views.
- 4 A large number went for option A which is too stringent to need to be assumed. It is recommended that candidates consider all options and weight them up against each other – in this case option C being clearly better when put against option A.
- 5 Well answered.

- 6 A large number of candidates chose option B, perhaps treating the evidence that supports this as a reason. As explained above, comparing all options carefully would have allowed more candidates to see D as the right answer.
- 7 The majority went for option D which is not *necessary* as such a precisely stated assumption.
- 8 Many felt the sentence was countering the conclusion rather than a statement of explanation for why pot-holes are filled in.
- 11 Many candidates went for option A. Similarly to Q3 candidates were perhaps making the mistake that an argument against an opponent's views or actions constitutes a personal attack, or ad hominem flaw – which it need not necessarily be. In this case it was not.
- 15 The majority incorrectly chose option D, perhaps because of the word 'tradition' in the passage.

Sections B and C

- 16 (a) The vast majority got this correct, with only a small number identifying the end of paragraph one.
- 16 (b) This was well answered with the vast majority of candidates correctly locating at least one correct intermediate conclusion. Credit was lost commonly by continuing to quote the supporting reason, and not just the intermediate conclusion. Paragraphs 1, 2 and 4 all required candidates to not state the whole of the sentence as it included reason and intermediate conclusion. A small number gave parts of one of the counter-arguments which would not support the main conclusion, stopping them from potentially being intermediate conclusions.
- 16 (c) The counter-argument in paragraph 4 was much more often used. Common errors here were the treatment of 'this accelerates global warming' as the conclusion, or the 'what they say is just a myth' rebuttal as a conclusion.
- 17 As in previous sessions, the candidates found this very challenging. There were many good answers, which in evaluations did refer to the claim of efficiency. Many weak answers just repeated the passage or made statements such as 'statistics back it up well' without pointing out detailed strengths or weaknesses in the statistics and how they are used. Centres are recommended to look carefully at evidence question-practice with candidates, as it seems to be the skill they find most challenging in general.
- 18 Many candidates made the mistake of repeating the statement in the text. Some gave over-precise assumptions, which would not be needed, such as "bird droppings have not increased" or "no change in organic fertilisers". Candidates should ask themselves whether the detail they give is necessary for the reasoning, or if they should be less precise in their statements – often credit is lost because of this mistake.
- 19 Many candidates opted for "hypothetical reason" and then justified it on the basis of the 'could' in the sentence, showing a technical misunderstanding of this argument element.
- 20 Most candidates correctly pointed out the post hoc flaw but many struggled to adequately justify or explain other weaknesses despite pointing them out. The mark scheme should be instructive on the sort of detail that needs to be given. A small number of candidates wrote counter-arguments instead of evaluating, which is not what is asked for in the question.

- 21 (a)** Most candidates correctly wrote a hypothetical reason although many gave too narrow a focus on ingredients rather than the production methods.
- 21 (b)** There were many good answers to this question which indicated the problem and how that was negative. Common answers which scored well included pointing out that packets would be larger, meaning more waste or that labels would need to have very small writing, causing illegibility which would be pointless.
- 22** The further arguments in general had better structure than in previous sessions, with clear intermediate conclusions being used more commonly which developed from reasons and led to the main conclusion, without just being summary statements. Those that took time to plan seemed to write clearer and more tightly structured arguments which scored well. A number seemed to get caught up with arguing emotively, which often gave way to exaggerated statements, implausible reasoning and slippery sloped, often with rhetorical questions as well. It was very rarely the case that this happened when space had been used to plan the argument. It is advisable that candidates take time to consider their reasons and write a quick plan on an additional page before starting their answer.
- 23**

Fewer candidates continued their arguments on the additional pages than in the past and in general the ones that kept to the page seemed to write more tightly bound arguments with less emotive or rhetorical reasoning within their argument.

Candidates were more prone to emotive reasoning as opposed to rational argument in Q23 – and this was true both for candidates supporting as well as challenging the claim.

For both Q22 and Q23 a good range of different reasons were seen. Another advantage to candidates who think and plan first is that they tend to consider several different strands and do not get stuck in one avenue of thought.

F503 Ethical Reasoning & Decision-Making

General Comments

As on previous occasions, strengths and weaknesses tended to be characteristic of whole centres more than differentiating candidates within centres. In particular, candidates from a few centres still failed to use principles in their answers to Q4, even though such use is always central to the nature of the prescribed task.

The subject may have been of less interest to candidates than some others which have occurred in previous exams, and some of them found it difficult to envisage how various choices would work in practice. Many found it hard to imagine what it is like to be 60 years of age: several candidates depicted women over the age of 60 as fragile, ageing rapidly, and without long to live.

There were several examples of very bad handwriting in this session. Although examiners are careful not to penalise candidates for the inconvenience which illegible handwriting causes them, they have not always been sure that they have interpreted candidates' intentions correctly: so such candidates may have been indirectly disadvantaged.

Apart from those who wrote far too much for Q3, there was little evidence of candidates running out of time.

A surprising number of candidates used masculine pronouns to refer to Drs Miriam Stoppard and Gillian Lockwood.

As in some previous sessions, many candidates did not understand what was required by the short questions. Yet the range of formats which such questions may take is not a secret, and is readily available in the endorsed textbook and elsewhere. Part of the preparation required for this exam is practice in recognising and answering questions of these types.

Comments on Individual Questions

1 Q1(a) produced a few good answers, but many candidates offered counter-arguments instead of evaluations of the reasoning. The most popular evaluative comments were "The document is bias" (sic), "It is only her opinion" and "The argument is not supported by evidence." Neither of the first two of these answers was credited, but the third was judged to fit the descriptor of "generic problem" and awarded 1 mark. Brief guidance on how to approach questions of this kind is available on page 23 of the endorsed textbook.

Q1(b) did not specify what kind of problem was required, and several different approaches were acceptable. A lot of candidates correctly identified vested interest as a problem with Document 3. There were a few other correct answers and a significant number of counter-arguments (which were not credited).

2 Most candidates failed to recognize that this question asked them to identify problems of implementation and instead offered counter-arguments against such a policy. One partial-performance mark was awarded to answers which correctly identified a problem which might be caused by the implementation of such a policy, since that was closer to the intentions of the examiners than counter-argument. Guidance on how to approach questions of this kind is available on pages 20 – 22 of the endorsed textbook.

- 3 Candidates are gradually realising that Q3 on the new specification does not expect long answers, but some otherwise strong candidates unwisely wrote more on Q3 than was justified by the number of marks available. Teachers could usefully encourage candidates to be succinct in their answers to this question.

On this occasion (unusually), candidates were asked to evaluate a particular choice, which had been chosen because it excluded some older women but not others, but very few candidates identified the ambiguity of the choice in these terms. The examiners had intended the context of this choice to be the current law in the UK, *ie* no age limit (Doc 1); however, they credited candidates who evaluated this choice by comparing it with the lower *de facto* limits of 45 for private clinics (Doc 1) and 39 for the NHS (Doc 2). The best answers made it clear which alternative they were considering, or even compared the choice with both alternatives. Weaker answers did not make this clear, and even seemed to switch options between one paragraph and another. Many candidates unrealistically assumed that under this policy the IVF treatment would be available to women below 60 irrespective of their health.

Nearly all candidates succeeded in identifying three valid criteria by which to evaluate the stated choice, but a significant minority used the criteria to discuss the general issue of whether elderly women in general, or women over the age of 60 in particular, should have IVF, instead of specifically evaluating the policy of making IVF available up to 60 but not beyond.

Nearly all candidates accepted the suggestion that they should consider child welfare as one of the criteria. A lot of candidates chose cost as one of their criteria, but many of them had difficulty in focusing on precisely what they meant by it. It could have meant cost-effectiveness, cost to the community, cost to individuals or economic impact on fertility clinics, all of which were valid criteria in this case, but candidates needed to be clear which they meant. As in other scenarios, public opinion was in principle a valid criterion, and some candidates succeeded in making valid evaluative comments about it, but other answers consisted of mere speculation, which was not credited.

A good number of candidates recognized the importance of identifying ambiguity in the application of criteria and of using intermediate conclusions to strengthen the structure of their answers.

- 4 Most candidates succeeded in identifying a clear choice, which they then defended, but some chose something quite vague, like having an age limit, without specifying at what age it should be set. A few candidates concluded by rejecting the choice they had selected, even though the question instructed them to support it.

As in the first two sessions of the new specification, some candidates failed to identify an alternative choice, while others did not make their alternative clear or just mentioned it without saying why they rejected it. Simple contradictions were not accepted as alternatives, because the arguments against one simply constitute arguments in favour of the other, but – as in other parts of the exam – some credit was given to unsuccessful attempts. Candidates who came down in favour of no age limit generally did so on the grounds that a medical evaluation was a better criterion than age, which was unrealistic since even with an age limit, prospective mothers would also have to pass a health check. Some candidates seemed to have a rather naïve belief that a health check could reliably estimate how many years of life patients would have left.

There was some excellent use of documents in support of arguments, including nuanced evaluation. However, some candidates began their answer by assessing the credibility of all the documents, which is of very little value. The credibility or plausibility of particular claims or of the documents in which they appear should be made in the context of an argument in the main body of the essay. Some candidates misunderstood part of Document 1, because they failed to realize that in the context of tabloid newspapers, the expression “politically correct” is pejorative. Several candidates recognized that the author of Document 3 has expertise, but some failed to offset this against her vested interest. Some candidates cited the last part of the last sentence in Document 4 as if it held true without the important qualification in the first part of the sentence, and thereby seriously misrepresented it.

Some of the best answers were particularly creative in selecting and applying principles which were appropriate for this issue, but candidates who had decided in advance which principles they would apply to the issue may have found this approach less effective than in some previous sessions. Some of the better answers included brief explanations of why particular principles were more or less appropriate in relation to this issue. Not many candidates made use of free-standing principles, although (as the mark scheme indicates) several persuasive ones were available in this case.

Utilitarianism and Libertarianism were the most popular principles chosen. Applications of Utilitarianism ranged from the perfunctory and superficial to the well-considered and nuanced. At least one candidate argued creatively and persuasively against imposing an age limit on the basis that Act Utilitarianism judges each case separately. On this occasion, nothing much was gained by contrasting Bentham’s version of Utilitarianism with that of Mill. The Principle of Liberty (principle of harm) was also used appositely by many candidates.

Candidates from a few centres used the word “deontological” in a very reduced and debased way, claiming, for example, “From a deontological point of view it is just right to allow people of all ages access to this treatment and therefore there should be no age limit on IVF.” Sentences like this were not credited as the use of principles.

Several candidates attempted to apply Kant’s Categorical Imperative to this issue. The first version, the Principle of Universalization, was neither well understood nor persuasively applied, but the principle of not using persons as means only was much more pertinent and some candidates made good use of it, in relation to elderly women and/or their potential children.

Several candidates made good use of the principles of non-maleficence and/or beneficence, which were particularly appropriate in this case, because in addition to their identification as prima-facie duties by W D Ross, they are also two of the principles of biomedical ethics (along with autonomy and justice) influentially identified by T Beauchamp and J Childress.

References to human rights were frequent, but generally not very persuasive. Many candidates referred to a woman’s right to bear a child, but most of them simply asserted that there is such a right without reference to any underlying value or authority and either assumed or asserted without argument that it included the right of elderly women to have access to IVF. Some candidates made use of a child’s right to be born, without apparently recognising how odd it is to attribute that right to a child who has not even been conceived. Several other rights were identified without supporting argument, including the claim from Document 1 that a child has a “right to grow up with its parents”.

Many candidates made use of the principle of equality or egalitarianism, but most of them took it for granted that this principle implied that everyone should be treated in exactly the same way, in particular that eligibility for IVF must not be based on any criteria.

References to Natural Law ranged from the simplistic to the sophisticated and creative. Some candidates recognized that since Natural Law is opposed to IVF in all cases, it has little to say about who should have access to it. However, a few candidates argued persuasively in favour of a liberal policy on the grounds that it is an application of the propagation of the species, which Aquinas identified as the second principle of Natural Law. At least one candidate supported a liberal policy by arguing persuasively that it is in accordance with Natural Law for humans to use their intelligence to solve problems.

It was not easy to see how to apply Divine Command ethics to this issue, and most attempts to do so were unimpressive. Some candidates conflated it with Natural Law, while others claimed that Christians are opposed to all innovation, which – if it is true at all – is scarcely a matter of principle. However, a few candidates made use of Situation Ethics, and a few others perceptively defended a liberal policy on IVF as an application of the command to be fruitful and multiply.

F504 Critical Reasoning

General Comments

At the top end there were some very strong scripts demonstrating a high level of thinking skill and engagement, with a thoughtful, targeted approach to answering the questions. The weakest performances demonstrated superficiality of thinking and comprehension, often combined with a formulaic, generic approach to answering the questions. Some candidates would benefit from an understanding that the mere presence of evidence is not a strength, nor its lack a weakness, and that the mere presence of a counter argument does not make for strong reasoning. The skills in critical thinking are to consider how logically sound an argument is (with or without evidence and counter argument), *how well* evidence is used if present, whether a counter argument is relevant and telling, and *how well* such a counter argument is answered.

Candidates would be well advised to think carefully about how long to spend on each question. Some candidates wrote two pages for Q1 which was worth 8 marks, and half a page or even nothing for Q3, which was worth 20 marks. Many candidates wrote considerably more for Q4 than for Q3, even though both were worth the same number of marks. Although answers are judged on merit rather than length, this unevenness does indicate that more thought could be given to weighting answers according to their value – and perhaps that some candidates would have time to think more before they start writing.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 It seemed that candidates were not prepared for the answer to be 'the document is not an argument.' They seemed on the whole to expect that the document would be an argument, and that their task was to analyse the argument. This question tests the ability to distinguish argument from other types of reasoning such as explanation, report, ranting, opinion-giving. Candidates should be able to judge whether some or all of the reasoning in a passage gives rationally persuasive support to a stated main conclusion or not. If there is not a stated main conclusion supported by all the reasoning, candidates should be able to say whether part of the document is an argument, or whether there is an implied but unstated conclusion.

In the case of Document 1, the author was responding to a speech by Barack Obama, calling for 'China to abandon the so-called practices of "internet censorship."' The author's intention was to defend China's practice against Obama. There was no stated conclusion, but the author intended to persuade readers that Obama was wrong to ask China to abandon these practices, partly by showing that internet censorship is far from a simple issue of right and wrong as seen through examples, partly by showing that the internet can be used in a damaging way, and partly by giving the two principles that 'the government has a responsibility to better manage the internet' and that 'the internet should serve public good.' So the document is a mixture between report of an event, fact giving, opinion giving and partially supported argument, with an unstated conclusion.

Almost all candidates read, 'The government has a responsibility to better manage the internet' as if it were, 'The government should better manage the internet.' The first of these claims is a principle which is not at all supported in the text. The second would have been supported to some extent. Most candidates therefore saw the document as an argument with the conclusion that 'the Government has a responsibility to better manage the internet.' This interpretation was accepted for some but not full credit.

A few candidates argued that the document was not an argument because it was expressing a view but not supporting that view.

- 2 This question was well done by most candidates. The main mistake was to ignore the first sentence altogether – a big mistake since this was the conclusion.
- 3 This question tests candidates' ability to evaluate how strong reasoning is, and to compare the strength of reasoning in two documents. Answers making trite credibility points are inappropriate as the credibility of a source does not in most cases affect the strength of the reasoning within the source. It is possible that a censored article from chinadaily.com might be well reasoned, and possible that an uncensored article from The Times might be very poorly reasoned. It might be good critical thinking to say, 'this article comes from a censored newspaper, so I had better check the facts on both sides and look out for an argument without a bias or with a different bias so that I can try to form an objective picture.' It is not good critical thinking to say, 'this article comes from a respectable British newspaper so it must be well reasoned.'

Furthermore, the South Korean president, who holds a high position of authority, is not necessarily right because he is president, nor does the inclusion of a quotation from this figure of authority in Document One necessarily strengthen (or indeed weaken) the reasoning. Whether the reasoning is strong depends on what he says and how well it is used to support a point. Similarly, the inclusion of a quotation by 'Sir Tim Berners-Lee, one of the genius originators of the World Wide Web' does not necessarily strengthen (or weaken) the reasoning in Document Three. Neither his being a Sir, nor his having been involved in the origins of the web necessarily makes his ideas on how it should be run now any good, and certainly doesn't make the author's reasoning about these ideas strong.

Answers referring to the number of elements that the argument has are also inappropriate. Some candidates appear to have the idea that an argument is a collection of elements such as a certain number of reasons, each supported by an example, a counter argument 'to show that you have considered the other side of the argument' (however weakly you respond to it) and an intermediate conclusion. This is as true as the idea that an internal combustion engine is a collection of spark plugs, cams, pistons and carburettor etc. The elements don't work unless they are properly connected. This question tests whether candidates can tell whether the elements are properly (logically) connected, not whether they can count the bits.

The best answers to this question combined insight and considerable critical thought, weighing the strengths and weaknesses of both documents and considering whether the reasoning in each document was strong enough to achieve its aims.

Some candidates argued, for example, that persuading us to accept that kitemarks of quality on websites were a good idea (Document Three) was a very weak claim which needed much less support than the strong (implied) claim in Document One that the (Chinese) government should censor the internet. So, although Document Three was ranting, opinionated and full of flaws (such as a straw man, irrelevance and being boring), the example of Aaronovitch's afternoon checking the Wikipedia entry on Rassinier did show that bias could be hard to detect, and this one example was enough to indicate that kitemarks could be useful. On the other hand, these candidates felt that a few examples of limited internet regulation with no evidence of its effectiveness, together with a vague mention of social unrest for selfish benefits and a slippery slope of possible disaster coming from a free internet, were not strong enough despite the clarity of structure to support the strong (implied) conclusion in favour of government censorship or better management of the internet. Some of these candidates considered that 'social unrest' might not be a negative thing if it was opposing repressive government, and that 'better managing' the internet and censorship were not necessarily the same thing. On this basis, these candidates felt that Document Three was stronger than Document One.

Other candidates argued effectively, for example, that, although Document One was produced by a censored Chinese publication which could not possibly express an opinion in favour of a free, uncensored internet, and had probably selected only information that was useful to its case, it did nevertheless manage to make a case for government management of the internet. The document was clearly structured, and did effectively show that even countries which oppose internet regulation and censorship, such as the US, did regulate or censor to some extent, which did effectively show that internet censorship is not a simple issue of right and wrong. On the other hand, these candidates felt that Document Three was emotive, unclear and did not have a stated main conclusion, which made it more of an opinion piece than reasoned argument. They also felt that the one example was ineffective, that, although it was a good example of twisted information on a website, it is common knowledge that anyone can amend Wikipedia, which makes it less reliable. So what is true of Wikipedia might not be true of other websites, and if there was less poisonous bias in other websites, this might mean that there wasn't such a need for a kitemark as the author suggested. These candidates argued that Document One was stronger than Document Three.

- 4 The format of this question was changed slightly. Whereas in the past, candidates have been given a claim and asked to support or challenge it, this time candidates were asked:

'To what extent should the internet be regulated?' Write your own argument to answer this question. You should use your own ideas and may use ideas/evidence from the resource booklet to help you.

For some candidates this slight change was helpful in avoiding the feeling that they needed to completely support or completely challenge a claim, and allowed them to explore the middle ground. This was positive and led to some interesting reflection. Other candidates ignored the 'extent' and argued for or against regulation. This limited the marks they could access. Some candidates ignored the command to 'write your own argument' and simply wrote their opinions about various forms of regulation. This again limited the marks they could access.

The best arguments were thoughtful and well-structured, generally of one and a half to two pages – ie reasoned and well thought through rather than long and loose. These answers considered the differences between regulation and censorship, weighed up a right to freedom of expression with a right to be safe from illegal practices, made an analogy between law in the real world and law (or regulation) in the virtual world and gave thought-through examples of things that might or might not be censored. Some candidates considered whether recent demonstrations in Egypt did show that social networking was a negative force that should be blocked by the government in the interests of peace, or whether it was a good thing that people had been able to organise themselves to protest peacefully for democracy, and thus the social sites should not have been blocked or regulated in a monitoring sort of way. Some of them considered whether the Wikileaks revelations of last autumn might give us a line regarding internet regulation. They generally felt that information that might lead to conflict between countries or endanger lives should be restricted from full public accessibility.

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